BIBLICAL ARCHEOLOGY

Volume 1

An Introduction

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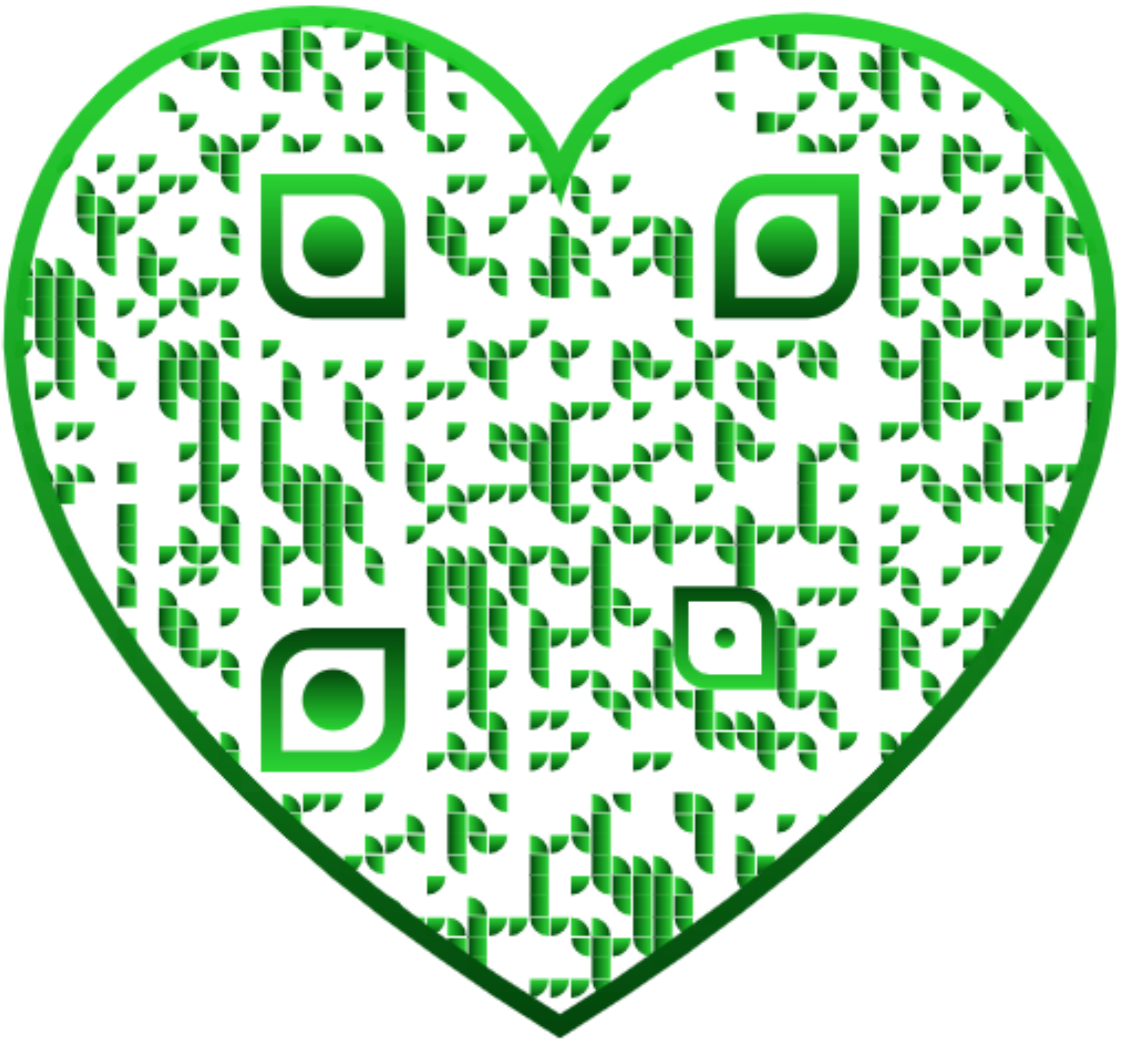

Biblical Archeology, Volume 1

Archeology And The Christian

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Editor: JW Thompson

5th Revised Edition

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Introduction

Bible and its message are completely dependent upon history. Events like temptation and fall in Eden, promise of a virgin-born savior, and the suffering, crucifixion, and resurrection of the savior are foundational to the Christian faith.

Almost all other faiths, isms, and religions can survive without an accurate literal history to support them, but not the Christian faith. Once the historical foundation is distorted, its theological claims and foundations automatically come to a naughty. This fact was recognized by the atheists and radicals much more than the Christians because as a group they were always looking for loopholes, whereas the average Christian does not (and should not) try to dismantle his own faith.

As a consequence, it is the anti Jew and the anti Christian thinkers and writers who initially did their best to study and attack the historical foundations of the Bible. Even at the time of Lord Jesus Christ there were the Sadducees who questioned in the Old Testament, and this tendency only increased from 200 AD onwards. Three centuries after Pentecost the opposition became strong and somewhat systematized as much as 15 valiums of books to attack the Bible. The attacks kept growing with the growth and expansion of the Christian faith, becoming most intense from around 1700s onwards.

Europe, which was the center of Christianity, was oppressed and ruled by an iron, hand the tyrannical and exploitative Roman Catholic Church. Consequently, rebellion and resentment was developing deep in the hearts of many intellectuals like over-heated lava, ready to come out and level everything within site as soon as it found as opening.

It was this milieu in which the Protestant Reformation came as a liberating force. People began enjoying religious freedom and liberty in Europe after a span of over one millennium. This liberty was a blessing for millions of common people, but it also gave liberty to the thinkers whose resentment against the church was simmering deep within for centuries. And it burst forth like a volcano, throwing out the baby with the water. Not only did they openly reject the church; they also immediately rejected the Bible and

Christian faith.

The modern western rationalism and theological radicalism is thus the illegitimate offspring of the millennium-long Roman Catholic oppression of thinkers.

With the rise of modern western dissent (properly speaking, resentment against the Christian faith, an increasing number of them started hunting for ways to dismantle the Bible. And historical sciences came in handy because at that time it was relatively easy to argue against the Bible in the name of history. Better yet for them, both scholar as well as the lay skeptic could easily use history, particularly the ancient history related to the Bible lands, to argue against the Christian faith.

Historical science were not as developed before 1700s as they are, ancient manuscripts and inscriptions were nit as plentiful as they are. Worse, nobody could as read what was available (say from ancient Egypt). So the history at that time rested upon plenty of false in knowledge, and it was easy both for the scholar as well as the layman to claim that this or that event, place, or people-group mentioned in the Bible was not known from the available historical reference. This was then carried to the next claim that since nothing was known of many things mentioned in the Bible, those things were false, the imagination of many pious writers.

While it is true that at the end of 1600s and in the beginning of 1700s there were many people, places, and events recorded in the Bible that were not known from any other sources, it was an illogical conclusion that therefore the Biblical record was false. This is similar to the conclusion of the person with a dislike for mathematics that since he is unable to solve a certain mathematical problem therefore the problem is unsolvable. Untold amount of scientific progresses been hindered retarded by this attitude, but the rationalists and theological radicals were not hindered in their anti-biblical agenda by such objective considerations.

By the beginning of 1700s, physical science progressed much, and a technological evolution was visible to everyone. And the radicals simply assured everyone (falsely, of course) that the historical sciences were also by

now equally developed. They started speaking of the “assured results of modern researches” in historical sciences, and these “assured results” in “historical sciences” coming mostly from voids and gaps in historical knowledge were used confidently by them to attack the historical portion of the Bible.

The most notables among these radicals were Germans, and these developments had more to do with a historical development of ancient historical science in Biblical lands. As the Protestant movement spread, the Germans began to finance their theological seminaries (most of which were departments of secular universal) through government money. In other words, the German theological seminaries were more Government-controlled bureaucracies. This brought in an unbelievable amount of money to theological departments without any kind of spiritual responsibility since the departments were controlled by the government, personal salvation, intimacy with the lord, or spiritual commitment were not at all important for appointment in these seminaries.

The government bureaucracy that controlled these German Universities (directly or by proxy) knew only one thing: these people are appointed for thus they need to be academically “qualified” for the jobs. Things like “spiritual commitment” had no place in the vocabulary (or rulebook) of the government. The situation was ripe for a large number of men to get into this government funded “jobs” without having to bother about inconvenience like faith and commitment.

Thus eventually the German (and many other) government-funded (and there for bureaucracy-controlled) seminaries became populated with men who considered Bible and Christianity to be things to be done away with. Thus using the liberal amounts of funds available (for this was the time these countries flourished much) from the Government these men published a large number of multi-volume works and journals that had the singular aim of destroying the Christian faith. And this had worldwide repercussions, because these books went worldwide and brainwashed the Christian community that was yet to realize what the hidden aged of this theological radical was.

It is claimed by many that the frog has a peculiar way to behave that can be

used to kill it. According to it, if one drops a healthy frog in a pot of boiling water, it would react so fast to the danger that it would be out and totally safe within a fraction of a second. But put the same frog in a pot of cold water and warm it gradually and it would not react. The gradual change in temperature makes this cold-blooded animal to adjust to the temperature, desensitizing and cheating its otherwise powerful defense system. By the time the helpless frog decides to jump out (that is, if it is any longer able to decide) it is already cooked to death. Scientifically true or not, this story has a true social, theological, and spiritual counterpart. Large sections of human society have repeatedly been brainwashed and manipulated in this manner to abandon things of lasting value in favor of trivial and trinkets. Others have even been led to social or spiritual death, and the case of German theologians falls into that category. German had made a mark for themselves in almost every field of knowledge in 1700s and 1800s with the likes of the 40-volume Sacred Literature of The Ancient East. So very few Christians expected German Christian scholars to misguide or cheat their readers. However this is exactly what they did in every field of Bible and theology, and by the time the Christian world realized what was happening, the damage was already done.

The damage inflicted by the German radicals was maximum in the area of the reliability of the Bible. Based upon the “assured results of historical researches” they convinced almost the whole of Christendom that neither the Old nor the New Testament is historically accurate. Their dogmatic assertions included gems of insights such as “Moses could not have written the Pentateuch because of the art of writing was non-existent in 1500BC”. It took only less than a century to discover writings produced as early as 3100 BC.

Unfortunately old slogans often become contemporary dogma, and no amount of discoveries to the country can convince people of the truth. As a consequence, today Bible seminaries around the world continue to teach the old German lies as truths to be reckoned with. Even a good number of conservative seminaries teach subjects that have long been proved to be false. However old ideas die hard, especially because of man’s spiritual rebellion. And here comes the importance of Biblical Archeology.

Archeology And The Christian Apologist

As I made clear through the proceeding historical sketch, to most people, today the Bible stands as a historically discredited book. This is not because the facts of history go against the Bible, but rather because of the false propaganda of the German radicals who were aided in this mission by liberal government funding. Only a reasonable acquaintance with Biblical archeology can help a person to counter the pervasive influence of these sophisticated lies.

There are several categories of people who have doubts about the historical accuracy of the needs to us a different approach with each one of them. And before one can do that it will be good to have a look at these groups and their distinction.

Non-Christians: A large number of non Christian take interest in maters related to Bible and history, as testified by a large number of books on this subject they by, specially from the secular marketplace, the alleged travels of Jesus to India, etc, continue to be bestsellers in the non Christian world. Consequently, the Christian desiring to use Archeological information to help other has a very large segment non-Christians among his possible clientele.

The most responsive among these are usually well read, or willing to read any useful publication on this topic. They are serious in their inquiry, and once they get answers beyond a threshold, they become highly inclined to accept Christ as their savior. This group should be given the highest priority among non-Christian inquirers, and one should be willing to go to any length to make resources available to these people. They do not argue, do not waste your time unnecessarily, and do not wander aimlessly. They know what they wish to read, and once that is given to them devour it with all devotion.

The second group is made of inquirers who are not very serious. They wish to know, but have nothing more than that in their minds. At the same time they are not at all hostile to the Christian faith, and therefore they are very useful targets. Simple booklets and articles on exciting archeological topics such as the twenty-thousand-volume Ebla Tablets, or the discoveries related Caiphas the High Priest, etc. can be quite attractive to them. Once they develop a certain level of interest, more serious archeological material can be given to

them.

Then there are two difficult groups: the escapist and the serious anarchist. The escapist has some inkling of truth, and knows that anything that leads to proof for the historical veracity of the Bible would put pressure on him to believe. This he does not want to happen, and therefore he never takes anything seriously. For each solid proof he will have two or more excuses. Thus it is futile to invest too much time on him. Rather than pouring out all the available proof on him, it would be better to confront him with one solid proof at a time, answering his objection, and pressing him not to evade the issue at hand. These people can tax even the most experienced apologist because one dishonest opponent is often worse than two are honest enemies are.

The serious anarchist is a person who does not want to accept the Bible, come what may, and is therefore well prepared to reject even the best evidence. However, there is a crucial difference between him and the escapist. Both of the rejects the evidence, but the anarchist tries to refute it while the escapist simply brushes it away. This means that one can at least get the anarchist involved in direct dialogue on the issues involved. This opens the door for confronting him with evidence, and there are many cases where such people have finally come to Christ.

Christians: The Christian community is full of people who are interested in historical evidences. Unfortunately, in spite of the proliferation of resources, many of them have not seen or read the best resources in archeology. Such people will be highly helped if the Christian apologist would share his knowledge of archeology with them. This can be printing done orally, through the print media, or even through the electronic media which have now become accessible to many. Within this group the professionally trained ones would enjoy material ranging from the popular to the highly technical. The untrained Christian, in spite of his interest, can become discouraged with material that is too technical. So he must be given resources that range from popular to semi technical. Once properly equipped, these people will become good resource-persons for helping others.

Within the Christian community one will also find certain people who are not at all serious about apologetic issues. Thus they might never get excited about

a book or lecture on archeology. However, they are not trying to escape the issue, and therefore they can often be won over to see the need for convinced, they can also render great help.

The third group among Christians can be called the “escape artist”. He uses all his energy and intelligence to avoid making a decision. This might be because of his inner rebellion, gradual deviation from earlier commitment, or unwillingness for any serious commitment. He wants to be labeled a Christian, but does not wish to make choices that make him one. Thus he keeps pretending to be serious and committed, but cleverly brushes aside every question and argument that demand an honest response from him. Christian apologists should avoid exhausting their collection of information on these people. Rather, they should present just one or two solid historical data and repeatedly try to bring these people back to these point, so as to elicit some define, howsoever feeble, response from them. Once they succeed in doing this, they can give out the next round of proof and repeat the same process. Instead, if they give out all the evidence to an escapist, they will be left with nothing to confront these people on the next occasion.

The most dangerous and harmful person is the Christian radical and anarchist. Since he is an insider to the Christian community, he knows how to spot the weakling, doubters, and the rebels. He knows what their vulnerabilities are, plus when and where to attack to influence these people and destroy their faith. And this they are Christians only in name and their loyalties are to anti-Christian philosophies.

Brief apologetic encounter with these people will rarely serve any purpose. Nor will longer encounters benefit if the Christian apologist is not thoroughly armed.

The best approach would be private encounter with these people by thoroughly equipped apologists. Plenty of time should be available, and only as much of the subject should be touched as can be handled with the available time. It is definitely possible to engage these people in interaction, but plenty of time and solid preparation would be needed to do that in a satisfactory manner.

Summary: The Christian faith is a completely history-dependent one. Biblical Archeology helps Christian to defend the historical foundations of Bible. This helps them to anarchists, and strengthens Christians in their faith.

Practical Contributions of Biblical Archeology

Today there are thousands of subjects for studies, with hundreds of specializations within each. Biblical Archeology is one of these thousands, and many Christians wonder whether it is of any practical use to the average Christian.

About twenty percent of born-again and God-fearing Christian face serious doubts about the reliability of the Christian faith. Any help from any coiner is welcome to help solve their doubts. Such people consider Biblical Archeology very important because they are greatly helped by it. However the remaining eighty percent do not know this. Yet they to need it, are helped by it, and should know at least something about the way they are helped.

1. Contribution In Defense of Faith:

Christian faith today face attacks from all over, such attacks were always there, starting from what the Serpent told Eve in the Garden of Eden. However the intensity of attacks have increased much in the last three decades.

The growth of the science and technology in the last three to five centuries have now made it possible for a small group of dedicated anarchists to influence a very large number of people easily, quickly, and economically. Consequently, the attacks against the Christian faith have become widespread and ever-present. This affects both the Christian as well as the non Christian. Younger Christian develop an increasing set of doubts, while non Christians find barriers to faith developing in their minds.

The people mentioned above need someone to tell them of these historical developments that have supported the Bible. Starting from the discovery of the very town of Abraham, the settlement of Joseph and his brothers, the body of Pharaoh Ramses (After whom Ramses town was named), the stables of Solomon, the inner court where the king extended the scepter to Esther, the city where Daniel and his friends lived, the places where Jesus ministered, the remains of Caiphas the High priest, and that of James the brother of Jesus, someone should tell them about the tens of thousands of discoveries of Archeology that have a bearing on the history recorded in the Bible. This is

done by Biblical Archeology.

When the appropriate information from Archeology is given to these people, their questions are answered, doubts are cleared, and their faith is strengthened. Attacks shall keep coming, but since they have seen most of their objections melt away, the object of their faith is defended.

2. Contribution In Witnessing: We live in an age of increasing skepticism and opposition to spiritual matters. Thus as soon as we preach the gospel, this skepticism rises as a barrier in accepting the gospel. Even those who are touched by the gospel and those who wish to accept often find these barriers preventing them from taking the final leap of faith.

Often the problem can be summarized as “I have heard about some problems related to the reliability of the Bible. Can you help me clarify those doubts are removed and it becomes easier for them to accept Christ.

There are numerous cases where Archeology has helped thinking people to get answers related to the trustworthiness of the Bible. This has then led many of them to Christ, and that is another value of Archeology for Christians.

3. Contribution In Strengthening Faith: There are many believers who do not face much of a doubt about Bible and the Christian faith, but who nevertheless welcome any information that shows that their faith stands upon sound historical foundation. When such believers hear about Bible-related discoveries, their faith is strengthened further.

It has been noticed that whenever a lecture is held on Biblical Archeology, at least twenty percent of people come from this category. They do not have much of a doubt, but their faith is strengthened substantially when they hear these lectures. The same thing happens when they are exposed to good articles and books on Archeology.

Every book is the product of a human society, which leaves a definite imprint on the book. Through the Bible is the verbally inspired Word of God, this imprint can be clearly discerned.

The more ancient works like Job and Genesis are very much different from Psalms, which are different from Malachi. All of them are different from the

Gospel of Mathew, which is different from Luke.

In addition, a book can be fully understood only when the idiom, the cultural context, and the historical background are understood. This is not to say that only an expert in ancient languages and cultures can understand the Bible. On the contrary, God has inspired His Word in a manner that communicates to people of all societies, eras, cultures, and age groups. At the same time, a knowledge of the background and culture of a book definitely helps a deeper understanding of the book. Archeology plays a significant role here, some of which are mentioned below.

4. Better Appreciation of Biblical Narratives: Many Biblical narratives, such as the way God called Abraham, the way Joseph was sold, imprisoned and elevated, the way Daniel was cast into the den of lions, etc, have challenged God's children for millennia. Yet a knowledge of their background can create a deeper impression upon anyone.

For example, when God called Abraham to leave Ur, it was a call to leave the most prosperous, literate, technologically advanced, and rich country and its privileges for living life-long in tents in places hostile to human habitation. It was more like a call to an unbelievably rich prince of a most prosperous and powerful country to abdicate that position for life-long poverty and uncertainty. Except for a rare case of career-missionaries, nobody can heed that kind of a call even if a life-long support is guaranteed to them.

Daniel and friend lived at a time and in a country where even native officers in king's place always lived in terror about king's displeasure. Thus the aliens like Daniel and his friends had nothing humanly speaking to assure them in any way. Kings and emperors used to be so cruel, and their executions so savage, that it was a common practice to skin people alive, mount that skin on frames, and display then at the gate of the city. The crime for which such punishment were given were often small things such as displeasing the king during routine conversation, or the king taking a disliking for the smallest thing in a person's life.

An understanding of the above facts helps one to better appreciate the risks taken by Daniel and his friends. It also tells us that Queen Esther's attempt to go to the Inner court to meet the king without an invitation originating from

the king himself was definitely playing with her life.

Thus Archeological discoveries and the historical, cultural, social information reconstructed or gleaned from them helps us to understand numerous Biblical narratives with greater depth and appreciation.

5. Better Understanding of Biblical Languages: Except for a couple of chapters that are written in Aramaic, the rest of the Bible is written in Hebrew and Greek. While both these languages are spoken today, these are totally different from the Hebrew or Greek of the Bible. Thus Modern Hebrew or Greek cannot be used straightway to understand the precise meaning, idioms, or nuances of the Biblical languages.

The understanding of Biblical Hebrew and Greek was kept alive by transmission from generation to generation through a small group of scholars, but none of them had the benefit of interacting with any significant number of extra-biblical writings in these languages. One should not forget that by BC 300 even a significant number of Jews were no longer able to enjoy the Old Testament in Hebrew, and it had to be translated then in to Greek, (This translation is called Septuagint, and often symbolically addressed as the LXX). If that was the situation with Biblical Hebrew in 2200 years ago, one can only imagine the predicament of Modern scholars. The Greek used in the New Testament was similarly so different from the Greek of the secular literature available that many Christians used to maintain that the New Testament Greek was some kind of a special “Holy Spirit Greek”.

While the Bible translations done in the last 2200 years without ready access to an abundance of similar extra biblical Hebrew or Greek were adequate for the faith and practice of the church, the situation changed radically from 1700 onwards. Theological radicals and rationalists started to subject the text of the original languages to critical and irreverent scripting with the clear-cut agenda of discrediting the Bible, for this they used many tactics, one of which was compare Greek and Hebrew vocabulary of the Bible with languages similar to that of the Bible to arrive at conclusions damaging to the Christian faith.

Many of the Hebrew/Greek words were obscure specially those words that were used only once in the entire Bible. Critics were quick to attribute fancy

and false meanings to them with the express purpose of damaging the Christian faith. They were arguing from silence, and it was quite difficult to refute them without hard linguistic evidence.

This meant that as long as a substantial amount of documents using the same language are not discovered, Christian will continue to be harassed by theological radicals and atheists. And from the beginning of 1800s such discoveries started, and by mid 1900s they had discovered so many manuscripts in the both these languages that the critics were amazed.

Grammar books, dictionaries, vocabulary lists, parallel texts in multiple languages, and everything that one can imagine in relation to Biblical and related languages how now been discovered. Scholars of all shades, including non-conservatives have analyzed them in great detail. Even language-related computer software has been developed to aid this kind of analysis. The net result is a quantum jump in the understanding of Biblical languages. Much light has also been thrown on figurative expression, which are common throughout the Bible.

6. Better Understanding of Manners and Customs:

People in all societies and during all times follow certain manners and customs that are important for them but unknown to others. Often people from another culture feel strange when they hear of manners and customs of a group of people. Often this feeling extends both ways.

What is worse, when people from one group try to understand another group, these unknown manners and customs introduce vast gulfs in mutual understanding and communications. The gulf becomes wide if the two cultures are removed far from each other either in time or in geographical location.

Through the message of the Bible is a timeless one, it is often conveyed by people of a totally alien culture, removed several millennia away, in languages that are not used by the majority of people.

Sarah asking Abraham to take her servant as a wife, and Jacob’s wives giving their maids to their husband looks strange to the modern man. He finds it difficult to understand the reasoning used by those women. Only an understanding that it was a common practice to fully adopt sons of servant

girls would help the modern reader to appreciate what transpired in these families. Only this information will help the modern reader to understand how all the twelve men became Patriarchs, through not all of them were the legal heirs. This is only one example from the numerous cases where archeology has bridged the gaps in our understanding of ancient customs and cultures.

7. Accurate Knowledge of Ancient Objects: Man has been untiring discoverer and inventor for almost six millennia. He has thus made hundreds of objects both for using them vessels, lamps, tools) as well as for displaying (icons, statues). However, no culture, civilization, or country (however developed or wealthy) uses them all. Nor do they have access to all things invented. This is because what is of vital impotence in one place (for example a stethoscope) is no more than a toy in another place, and simply a stranger curiosity in another.

Neither is there a person who has seen all such objects, nor is there of whom can identify them all. Nor is there any language in the world, which has a name for all the objects available. Consequently when an object common in the ancient society is mentioned in the Bible, the modern reader need not have a name for it in hid language. Nor is there any reason for him to understand what this word refers to, unless he is able to see one of these objects.

A large number of tools and implements, furniture, vessels, cloths, weights and measures, ornaments, and arms are mentioned in the Bible. Machines such as millstone, vine-press and olive-press are mentioned. Jars and kitchen utensils, ironsmith’s implements weaver’s equipment, writing materials, scrolls and ovens are mentioned. Numerous other objects are also mentioned in the Bible. Discovering a piece or two helps scholars to understand their from and function. It also helps them to find or coin a name for that object.

Hundreds of thousands of samples of many objects (vessels, lamps, tools, and ornaments) mentioned in the Bible, plus coins, weights and measures have been discovered. Large and small statues of gods and goddesses mentioned in the Bible have also been found. Thus with help of a current Bible dictionary or Bible Encyclopedia the modern Bible-student can understand statements in the Bible more accurately.

Summary: Great has been the contribution of archeology for Christians and diligent Bible students. Discoveries have refuted the critics and radicals, have made the text more understandable, and have expanded our understanding of the customs, cultures, and objects common in Bible-lands.

BIBLICAL ARCHEOLOGY

Volume 2

Dating Methods

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Biblical Archeology, Volume 2

Dating Techniques in Archeology: An Intro

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Editor: JW Thompson

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Introduction

In the first volume we discussed the importance and the benefits of archeology for Bible Students. One of the important activities in archeology is age-determination.

An artifact, an inscription, or a mummy can be placed in historical context and interpreted only if one can speak with some certainty about what period it belongs to. The closer an object is to an event, the better one can interpret the event or the object, and the farther it is the less its relation to the given event. A cult object found from the home-town of Abraham, but used only two millennia after the time of the Patriarch, would throw less specific light on his life and more on the culture millennia after him.

Finding the collapsed walls of ancient Jericho is exciting. But this discovery is useless for Biblical archeology unless it can be demonstrated that this even happened within the dates specified by the Biblical historian. If someone can definitely establish that the discovered event happened 500 years before or after the dates demanded by the Bible, it automatically becomes useless for a possible correlation with the conquest mentioned in the Bible.

Thus attempts to develop methods to ascertain dates of artifacts and events have always been there right from the beginning of Archeology. Initially it was sufficient to know the country of origin and the general era, but as archeology was increasingly used to reconstruct ancient history with a measure of certainty, more accurate dates became important. But since most of the earlier archeological investigations were not done systematically, this immediately posed a problem.

Initial Problems Faced In Dating:

Since the initial excavations [for almost a century] were done haphazardly, the work of the archeologists was often no different from the grave-robbers. One robbed it, while the other plundered it, but both of them did it for personal gains. Thus most archeological diggings were unplanned and random, without any substantial record-keeping, and the eyes were fixed only on "major" artifacts. Things considered minor such as pot-shreds and pieces of bones and food were simply thrown away. Much evidence that could lead to reliable dating [especially with the help of Radiocarbon Dating] were lost for ever.

Further, since the artifacts were seen more as collectibles rather than objects of historical study, and since in those days the finders were keepers, the items discovered were simply divided among the collaborators. Some ended in their personal collection, while others were sold to status-conscious people in Europe and America, and some were even presented to rulers of various countries as souvenirs. This immediately destroyed the context in which these artifacts were found, destroying the opportunity to correlate them in any objective way, for if one of them could be dated in the place of discovery with certainty, the others could also be dated. Such an opportunity is lost for a large number of precious finds.

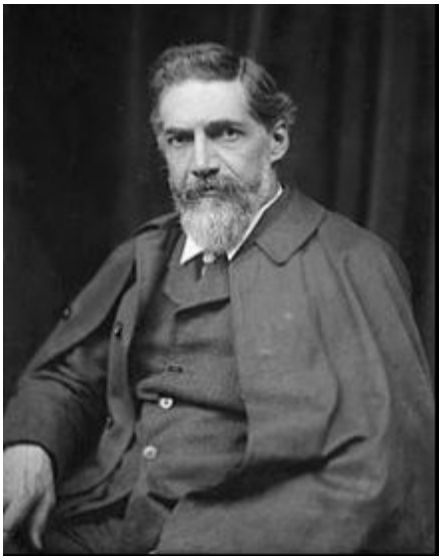
Worse, though many of the items now rest in museums where people [or researchers] can have access to them, a large number of the more attractive and precious artifacts have found their way into private collections of antique collectors worldwide. Most of them zealously guard their treasures, and do not give access to these for any purpose. Often when some of these people pass away, everything falls into the hands of their heirs who might have no appreciation for their historical value. Faced with the need to raise funds for their pet projects, or even to finance their vices, they often sell these in the antique black market. Others simply dump them in their attics, remaining lost for long time, or are even destroyed by people who have no idea of their historical value.

A good example what might happen to ancient artifacts in private possession is the story of what is popularly called Jenkins Venus. An ancient statue of goddess Venus, it was considered so precious by the original buyer that he had an entire Roman style building specially commissioned to house the statue. But his heirs did not have money to maintain it all, and sold it in auction at close to eight million pounds [approximately 15 million US Dollars].

Once some order came into archeological excavations, and once people started to reconstruct ancient history of places from where such finds came, the importance of dating them in situ grew upon them. It is only then that methods of dating began to be developed. However, this happened so late that even today a large number of finds available for public research still await more precise dating.

Development Of Dating In Archeology

Archeology is a science that has its origin in grave-robbers, antique hunters, status conscious collectors, gold-seekers, and the quacks who used ground-up mummies as cure for a number of diseases. Thus an attempt at dating was not usually done even by those who collected ancient artifacts for more serious purposes. However, with the development of interest in the history of ancient civilizations, there were some attempts to date finds in a more precise manner. This was, however, hindered by the random manner in which most of the earlier "academically oriented" excavations were conducted.



Flinders Petrie

Serious development of dating took place for the first time in 1890 when Flinders Petrie started work at Tell el Hesi. He drew attention of excavators to the fact that most mounds in the middle east were not a single ruined town, but rather a series of ruined towns one on top of the other, with the oldest one at the bottom and the most recent one at the top. Maybe the last town on top was ruined because it was abandoned, but almost all the previous ones were ruined after the town was defeated by enemy forces. And most invaders had the habit of rebuilding over the ruins of the conquered town, after they raged most of it to a suitable level. Nothing was thrown away, and everything from the defeated town became part of the filling.

Tell el-Hesi

Thus if a vertical shaft is dug carefully, one would see several distinct layers one below the other till one reached the virgin soil or bedrock. This became obvious at Tell el Hesi where a wadi [deep cut formed by erosion of mud and brick] exposed an entire vertical section of the mound, and several distinct layers were visible. Petrie measured the relative height of the layers from mean sea level, and created a chronology which was then applied to other places close by.

Example of Multiple Layers

FJ Bliss, who followed Petrie to work at this site reinvestigated, and established that the method gave some good results. In 1894 he combined the results of his work with that of Petrie, and established a rough chronology as far back as 1500 BC. However, soon it became obvious that this method is good only for a limited area because the scale established in one region might not have any correlation with the strata in mounds far removed from the first ones. Further, the method fell short of the goal in dating layers in those mounds where the layers overlapped, where they were not sufficiently horizontal, or where some layers were missing [because there was simply no human habitation there for several hundred years]. In spite of this weakness this method brought in quite some order in the chaotic chronology of the Tells investigated, but the need for a more accurate and objective chronology soon became obvious. The next important development was Pottery-based-dating.

Ancient Palastinian Pottery (Pic By: Ad Meskens)

Using pottery for dating might surprise many, but this need not be so. A comparison of pottery obtained from several cultures will immediately show even to the initiated layman that they exhibit distinct characteristics. This being so, a researcher can deduce much more information in a reliable manner, especially when an abundance of pottery is discovered from the same site. And this is often the case because pottery happens to be the most essential item in all ancient houses. Since they were mud or clay-based, they were relatively cheap. But once broken, they are of no use. Such pieces, often thrown into common dumps, survive unchanged for millennia. And when there is plenty of sample material, it makes deductions all the more objective.

Pottery-based Dating was pioneered, among others, by WF Albright. He was actively involved in the archeology of Palestine from 1920 to 1936. An exceptionally bright scientist, he had the special ability to apply information from several areas of knowledge into archeology. Because of this special ability, he took up an extensive study of pottery discovered from numerous places, compared their shapes, the available absolute dates related to them, the available relative dates, and so on, and proposed a pottery-based chronology based upon this exhaustive information.

Much of the result of this pioneer study was visible in his publication on the pottery of Tell Beit Mirsim in 1932 and 33. In it he was able to explain the chronology-determination based upon his study of Palestinian pottery. This work was then taken up and both expanded and refined by many others.

Though Pottery-based Dating was initially established only for Palestine, the work was eventually expanded to, and correlated with, the pottery of Egypt, Babylon, Mesopotamia, and practically all of the lands which are important for Bible studies. What's more, scribes based in countries like Egypt have left behind so many absolute dates [based upon lunar and solar eclipse, king lists, etc] that these can be used to calibrate the Pottery-based chronology of Egypt to a very high level of accuracy. This in turn can be used to compare potter found in those countries which had plenty of interaction with Egypt, as Egyptian pottery would find a place in these countries also. When this pottery is compared with the local ones, their dates can be determined with some certainty, and so on.

As a result of decades of careful work on pottery, correlated with absolute chronologies, helped by discoveries of modern science of dating, and compared with neighboring countries, Pottery-based Dating has become an important component of dating in Biblical lands.

Pottery-based Dating is only one of the many archeological dating methods available. It has been described here in so much detail mainly because of its close relation with, and development from, the process of archeological discovery itself. However, numerous other methods of dating are also available, and they are often used individually or with other methods to arrive at dates that are as accurate as possible. The most important ones among these are described below.

Dating Techniques Used By Archeologists

Dozens of techniques are now applied, often more than one to the same object, to determine the dates as accurately as is possible. These techniques can be divided into two: relative dating methods and absolute dating methods. As is obvious from the name, the latter gives more accurate results compared to the former.

One should realize that not all methods can be used for dating all kinds of discoveries. Further, some of them, such as Cultural Affiliation Dating, can be used on a wide variety of artifacts whereas some such as Radio-Carbon Dating can be used only on things having a biological origin. But then this should not surprise any because tools of science have both their range as well as their boundaries.

The major Relative and Absolute methods of dating used in archeology are as follows:

Relative Dating Techniques

** Cultural Affiliation
** Cation Ratio
** Fluorine Dating
** Obsidian Hydration
** Patination
** Pollen Analysis
** Rate Of Accumulation
** Seriation
** Varve Analysis

Absolute Dating Techniques

** Archeomagnetism
** Astronomical Dating
** Dendrochronology
** Electron Spin Resonance
** Fission Track
** Opacity Stimulation Luminescence
** Oxidizable Carbon Ratio

** Racemization
** Thermoluminiscence
** Radio-Carbon Dating

Introduction To Relative Dating Methods

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Cultural Affiliation Dating:

Each culture has its own discernible peculiarities, that change with time, so that an observer [who already knows about that culture] can see an object, hear about a practice, come across a word, and tell the approximate time-period to which it belongs. A good example is the English language.

The language of a drama, novel, or book written during the Elizabethan period will resemble the language in a remarkable way. Thus if one comes across an ancient manuscript that uses this type of a language, then one can safely assume that it is at least three to four hundred years. Of course, before coming to that conclusion once has to rule out many factors that can create apparent age. For example, one has to make sure that it is not a mock-writing done by a modern writer for some purpose such as a school assignment or a satire in older English but meant for consumption by the present readers.

Artifacts produced by various cultures, and similar tangible items, have come in so abundantly, and their styles and other discernible factors have been studied in detail that is so sufficient, that experts can often ascribe a tentative date within a day of the discovery. Surprisingly, this method of dating can be

used on an extremely wide variety of artifacts, inscriptions, clothing, pictures, and even languages.

Cultural Affiliation Dating can give good results in the hands of a careful researcher, specially if he has plenty of experience with this kind of dating, and if he has a large number of artifacts [large sample, speaking technically] to conduct this study. Often CAD can be a good starting-point, and from there one can move on to more accurate and exacting techniques.

CationRatio Dating: Rocks exposed to the elements of nature gradually become coated with a layer of special chemicals. This "rock varnish" is formed when calcium and potassium seep out of the rocks, which undergo predictable chemical changes, and quote the surface to a thickness that is somewhat proportional to the time for which the rock has been exposed to natural elements.

When someone carves a picture over such a rock, the "rock varnish" is removed from the area of rock that is removed through carving, whereas it keeps growing in areas untouched by the carving. Once the carved area is exposed to nature, a fresh coat of the so-called rock-varnish begins to form over the carved area. Thus if one is able to get to two surfaces, the one always exposed to elements and the one that has a younger coating after the carving, one can come to some conclusions about how long the carving has been there on the rock.

To do so, they scrape the varnish-like coating from the virgin rock surface and also from the carved surface, and obtain the ration between the positively charged ions [cations] in the samples. This ratio gives some idea of the age of the carving.

Cation Ratio dating is a relative method, and it has many uses, but it can never give absolute dating. Further, cation formation is affected by soil, moisture, and other chemical factors that affect it over the years. Thus tests are conducted on a large sample of rocks from a given geographical area [with some carvings, if possible, with a known date] and a calibration-chart is prepared. This chart then helps the investigators to come up with dates that are still relative, but which are more reliable.

Fluorine Dating: Fluorine is an element found abundantly in groundwater

in most places around the world. When men and animals are buried in soil rich with water content, the skeletal remains are inundated with a host of chemicals circulating through the ground water. Fluorine begins to accumulate in these bones through a complex chemical process. The accumulation of Fluorine is somewhat proportional to the time for which the skeleton remains buried underground.

This method for relative dating is now several decades old, and techniques are available for accurately assessing the amount of Fluorine that has accumulated in buried bones or implements made of bone [which are abundant in archeological remains]. Once a Fluorine profile of bones found in single location [or even an entire geographical area] is prepared, it can be used to place those skeletal remains in relation to each other in time. Thus though this method offers only relative dating, it offers a highly accurate method for establishing the general chronology of skeletal finds in relation to each other.

The famous Piltdown Hoax was exposed with the help of this method. Piltdown Man is the name given to the hypothetical "Missing Link" in human evolution discovered in Piltdown, England. More than 500 learned works appeared on this missing link and even a monument was erected in the place of its discovery to commemorate this find. However, once the discover of this "missing link" died, the bones [so far zealously hidden from the scientific community, who were given only plaster casts for their study] came into the possession of the scientific community for the first time. A series of Fluorine dating, and they found this "ape man" was a composite fabricated by mixing bones from various ages. Thus even relative dating have substantial scientific contributions to make.

Obsidian Hydration Dating: This is a relatively new dating method, developed around 1960. Though the primary purpose of this technique is to find relative dates, at times it gives dates that are as good as absolute. It also happens to be more easy to conduct, and cost effective in most cases.

Obsidian is a natural glass, formed by volcanic activity. During earlier part of the human civilization, when hardened metal implements were not available, Obsidian was highly prized for its ability to cut and shape implements. It has been found in the mountains of Americas, Europe, Near East to India, North

East Asia to Japan and even New Zealand. A large number of Obsidian artifacts have been discovered in all these places.

The Obsidian Dating is based upon a special characteristic of this material. As soon as there is a fracture in this material. that new surface begins to absorb water [hydration] at a level that is almost constant with time. The thickness of this hydration layer increases with time, and this time can be determined by cutting a thin piece of this material which is then examined under microscope.

The method yields only relative dates, but they are more reliable than dates given by many other methods. The cost is also less. But it needs to be used with care as the rate of hydration can be affected by many factors. Even in the laboratory the test is often repeated after one week on the same sample before the final result is declared.

PatinationDating: Many ancient artifact develop a thin outer layer of chemicals called the patina. The patina is the outermost surface of the artifact. This layer differs in color, texture, luster or composition from the rest of the artifact. This layer is created as a result of chemical, physical or biological change in response to the surrounding soil and environmental condition. When a large number of artifacts with patina are found in the same location, this layer can be used to gauge their ages relative to each other.

A good example of patination would be a flint artifact buried in some type of soil or sediment that causes its surface to be chemically altered and become white, yellow or brown. Another example would be the green crust that forms on bronze. Similar examples are known to even those who do not work with archeological samples.

So far five types of patination have been recognized and investigation. The first is bleaching, which is caused by the leaching out silica and replacement of it with lime salts. The second is induration of exposed surfaces, which is caused by the leaching out of soluble silica and redeposition of it at the surface forming a substance called silcrete. The third is limonite-penetration and staining which involves limonite clays and salts in the soil being absorbed by stone artifacts. The fourth can be called "desert-varnish" which is a condition created by extreme dryness and intense solar radiation affecting

artifacts. Fifth is the formation of a crust, caused by leaching out iron salts and redeposition at the surface.

With a site that has several layers of civilizations and a large series of objects from each layer, it is possible to observe obvious differences in the amounts of patina. With this knowledge the layer may be determined from the earliest to the latest civilization. However, work is going on to identify possible yearly-deposit-layers, so that more accurate dates might be obtained. However the work is still in the stage of growth.

Pollen Analysis: As microscopic techniques became more refined, and as an increasing number of organic materials were microscopically analyzed, the researchers began identifying pollen grains embedded in these materials that might range from dried up varnishes up to woven clothes. Pollen analysis which led to relative dating was first done by the Swedish geologist Von Post around 1916.

Since that time many other researchers have analyzed samples of known and unknown origins and dates, and have made extensive charts about pollen distribution. Using such pollen diagrams, information can be obtained about vegetation, floristic and climatic changes, sea level variations, etc. which took place in the past. The difference in amount of pollen in 1cc can tell about the condition of the forest which produced it. If the amount is small, it might have come from tundra whereas larger amounts might indicate forests with vegetation which depends on pollen or spore reproduction.

Surprisingly, the tiny grains of pollen are very resistant to external factors, and survive almost unchanged for millennia, preserving an accurate record of history. Thus in addition to the relative dates, the pollen analysis, study of vegetation history using the microfossils (pollen grain and spores of size 15-50 um), can give us useful information about the target area's condition in the present and past.

Thus once a pollen-containing sample is examined, and the types of pollen, along with their density is determined, it is checked against standard charts for that region to arrive at relative dates and other information. This is a highly useful method in spite of its relative nature.

Rate Of Accumulation: Archeological finds in most places are in the form of layers, with each layer representing one particular group/time of habitation. The topmost layer will be the youngest, and the successive layers below it will be older. The same will be the chronological pattern of the artifacts found, with the youngest one in the topmost layer and the oldest one in the layer at the bottom.

The depth of the debris/mud/other materials can give some idea of age, and on comparison the relative dates of the layers can be guessed to some degree. If there are mounds sufficiently close, and if some interdependence can be demonstrated, then the layers in one place can be compared to the other and more reliable relative dates can be fixed for both through cross-checking and comparison. If coins, or artifacts are discovered that can be dated more precisely, this relative dating can be made more accurate.

Rate of accumulation, though relative, has an important role to play in developing the history of succession in any given mound with multiple layers. It needs to be used with caution, because often only less than ten percent of a given large mound is excavated to expose layers. Second, intrusion of one layer into another is common where there has been digging by men or animals. The researchers needs to be careful to choose an area where this has not happened.

Seriation: This technique depends upon ceramics discovered from a given site. It has the advantage in that one does not need to know from which layer the ceramic came. For this kind of dating, the investigator takes all the available ceramics from a given place, and arranges them in a sequence that produces the most consistent pattering of that culture. This arrangement takes shape, technique, and usage-patterns of the ceramics to arrive at the relative chronology.

Ceramic artifacts all over the world have undergone change in shape, size, and manufacturing technology in a predictable pattern that has been understood relatively well due to the exceptionally large sample of ceramics discovered in situ for the last 150 years.

Among relative dating methods this has been a highly reliable method, used from the nineteenth century onwards, and has contributed much to the

understanding of the relative dates of various cultures.

Varve Analysis: Sediments are deposited by the rain/water cycle in many places. A type of these deposits is known as "varve". Counting the number of varves can give some idea of the relative age of a previously inhabited location and, by implication, of the culture. This techniques was developed by the Swedish scientist Baron de Geer in 1878, and has been refined further since then. Audio-visual equipment and computers are now used to make the counting accurate.

A varve is made up of two layers: a thick light colored layer of slit and a fine sand layer. These layers are sufficiently distinct from each other to be counted. Once the varve profile of a place is prepared, it can be compared with profiles in nearby area for cross-matching, and comparing of chronologies.

Varve-formation is affected by a number of factors, and therefore it provided only relative ages, and a strict numerical accuracy is not possible.

Summary: One needs absolute dating techniques for developing a reliable and numerically accurate chronology in archeology, but often absolute dating techniques are more difficult and not available. Thus the importance of relative dating. In spite of this weakness, it is amazing the substantial increase in chronological understanding that has come with the help of relative dating techniques.

Absolute Dating Techniques

The following are the more important Absolute Dating techniques used in archeology:

Archeomagnetism: Everyone knows that the earth has a magnetic field, and that this field is bound to create some effect upon things on the earth. It has been discovered that this magnetic field definitely affects materials, and even leaves an "imprint" on many of them. Using suitable equipment, that imprint can be discovered.

It has also been found via careful observations over the last four centuries, that the earth's magnetic field varies from time to time and place to place. The intensity (strength) and direction of the field are two factors that show significant variation. Charts have been made of such variation for different places, and for different eras. Once the magnetic factors of a new artifacts is determined, it can be compared with the magnetic charts for the location it was found, and its age can be determined with accuracy.

If no charts are available, the result would give a relative dating. But with scientists working in many fields around the world interested in archeomagnetism, Master Charts are being made and improved continually. This in turn makes the absolute as well as relative dating more accurate.

Magnetic materials, especially if they were melted and cooled in the ancient world, record the orientation and strength of the magnetic field accurately. On obtaining such material, often from hearths, their orientation in relation to the current North Pole is recorded accurately. Then they are removed, and studied for the direction recorded in them, and also the strength of the field. In this manner reasonable accurate dating can be obtained for the entire period of human habitation of the earth.

Astronomical Dating: Astronomy is one of the most exact sciences, and astronomical dates of ancient events such as solar and lunar eclipse can today be calculated with precision. On the other hand, if any of the ancient records

mentions such an event, its date can be calculated with unusual precision. Similarly, the date of construction of astronomically aligned buildings can also be calculated with accuracy, because with changes in earth's imaginary axis, the alignments are changing, providing a scale to determine dates.

Tables of known eclipses and their dates, tables of known angles and their dates, etc have been tabulated in great detail. Missing information can be filled in with great accuracy because here we are dealing with astronomical information that can be calculated precisely. Once available astronomical information from an archeological finding is compared with these tables, dates are known with a level of accuracy that will meet the strict demands of modern scientific investigation.

Dendrochronology: Many kinds of trees show somewhat concentric rings when cut across, polished and examined under microscopes. Generally these trees add one ring per year, though on rare occasions they can add more than one or none at all. However, since addition of one ring per year is the common behavior, these rings found on trees or their remains from archeological sites furnishes investigators with a very useful scale for determining time.

Tree-ring Example

Over the years investigators have studied a large number of samples, of many varieties of trees, originating in a number of places, and spread over almost 5000 years. There is an attempt to extend the range, but the paucity of

materials and other problems have made it difficult to obtain reliable dates beyond 5000 years BPE [before the present era].

Bristlecone Pines found in parts of America have provided a good amount of primary data to establish the calendar because these trees are able to survive the assault of the elements of nature for thousands of years. There has been much comparison and cross checking to solve the problem of multiple rings and missing rings.

The calendar is not as accurate as the Astronomical Dating system, but is sufficiently objective to date archeological discoveries with fascinating accuracy. Thus remains of trees from archeological sites are carefully cleaned, sliced, rings examined and compared, and reasonably accurate dates are established. Much work yet remains to be done, but what has already been done is extremely helpful in coming up with good results.

Electron Spin Resonance: There are random radiations all around, and electrons are liberated from atoms when they strike matter. In certain kinds of crystals these free electrons are trapped, and one can detect them using the method of ESR.

The older the sample, the larger will be the number of electrons trapped. Using samples of known age, extensive charts and lists have been compiled and standardized. Using this method, ages of a large number of quartz samples, fossilized teeth, flint, calcium carbonate in limestone, coral, and egg shells have been determined.

ESR Equipment

ESR dating has a very special advantage over many other methods in that it is non-destructive. Methods such as Thermoluminiscence and Opacity Stimulated Luminescence destroy the sample when it is dated. Thus there is no scope for retesting the sample. ESR, on the other hand, leaves the sample as it is, and the experiment can be repeated any number of times, giving a greater chance to eliminate experimental error.

Fission Track Dating:

This is a radioactive dating method, used in archeology to determine the ages of artifacts that contain uranium-bearing materials.

The atoms of many elements with high atomic weight, such as Uranium and Radium, break down spontaneously and this phenomenon is called Radioactivity. The breakdown is also called fission. This fission produces two particles [alpha, beta] and an electromagnetic radiation [gamma]. The product of fission knock down electrons, and produce ionization in a series when they pass through substances. Using special techniques, these paths can be seen as tracks, called "fission tracks". Obviously, the older a sample is, the greater would be the number of fission-tracks in it.

Natural and manufactured glass, stones used in hearths and in heating, and

fired ceramics and tiles. They start with zero fission tracks at the time they are formed, and accumulate tracks in proportion to their age. Using special methods, these tracks are then detected, counted and the age is determined.

Opacity Stimulation Luminescence: Many minerals within sediments release electrons when they are exposed to certain kinds of light waves. When the number of electrons in a given sample, after exposing them to suitable kind of light, are compared with the number in a sample of known age, the age of the first sample can be determined.

OSL is suitable for more recent samples that have been deposited by silty and sandy sediments, glacial deposits, etc. that have never been heated, and which have not had much exposure to light. This is a more recent dating method, and is still undergoing refinement and calibration, but is already yielding good results.

OxidizableCarbon Ratio: Less accurate than the methods discussed previously, it is still one of the more useful methods of absolute dating. The method depends upon Humus and Charcoal, that are gradually oxidized but only slowly and in a strictly predictable manner.

Thus when suitable samples are discovered, the ratio of carbon left with oxidizable carbon is found out and compared with calibrated charts to find out dates. This method can be used not only to find the ages of individual finds, but also to establish the age-relationship of many biological objects.

OCR and Radio Carbon methods have also been compared carefully, giving greater accuracy to OCR, and this method of dating has therefore become quite common.

Racemization: This technique is used to find ages of things that had an organic origin [humans, animals, plants]. All organic life has Amino Acids as its constituent. These acids are of two type, the L and D.

All living organisms essentially have the L type amino acids, which begin to change to D type after they die. This is known as racemization, and it the rate at which this happens is known accurately. Thus the level of racemization in a given sample can be compared with calibrated charts to find when the particular sample died. This method can be applied to human and animal

bones, teeth, plants, ostrich egg shells, mollusks, marine sediments, freshwater and marine shells, oyster shells, carbonate shells, calcareous sediments, and peats.

Some care is required because rate of racemization is affected by temperature. Thus though this is a method of absolute dating, it needs to be used in conjunction with other methods.

Thermoluminescence: This is a method of absolute dating, but still in a state of development. All natural materials are exposed to natural radiation, which dislodges electrons from the materials. Most of these electrons recombine with atoms, but a few of them remain trapped in locations that are known in solid-state physics as "imperfections". Heating of these samples releases these electrons, which produce a certain kind of light on doing so.

The method is used for dating ceramics, cooking hearths, rocks lying in hearths, and rocks that have deliberately been heated [such as flint or chert, a silica rich crystal]. Materials made of quarts, feldspar, diamond and calcite also lend themselves to this method of dating.

Radio Carbon Dating: There is practically none who has not heard of this method. So important has this discovery been that WF Libby was given the Nobel Prize for it.

Carbon is a stable element with an atomic weight of 12. However, a small amount of carbon with the atomic weight of 14 is produced in the atmosphere due to cosmic ray bombardment. C14 is radioactive, and decays at a known rate. All air-breathing organisms have a definite C12, C14 ratio in their bodies. However, once they die, the amount of C14 begins to decrease due to radioactive breakdown. Thus if we can determine the ratio of C12 to C14 in an organic sample, one can compare it with calibrated charts and find the age when that organism died [or when the tree was cut down].

A Mass-spectrometer Used In Radiocarbon Dating

Radio-carbon dating gives highly precise dates in samples upto 5000 years BPE, and unreliable dates in samples older than that. The methods gives erroneous results in those samples which have an abnormally low or high accumulation of C14, but with increasing investigations and calibrations such abnormal cases can be ruled out in most cases.

Radio Carbon dating has turned out to be the most helpful and accurate method of dating in discoveries that yield organic samples. Archeology would never have been the same were it not for Radio Carbon Dating.

Summary: Dating or date-determination is both a science as well as art which can give excellent results if all the available data and determination-methods are correlated carefully. Such work has helped archeologist to correlated ages of artifacts with history and such correlation has given gratifying results for those who study Biblical archeology.

BIBLICAL ARCHEOLOGY

Volume 3
Biblical Archeology And Apologetics

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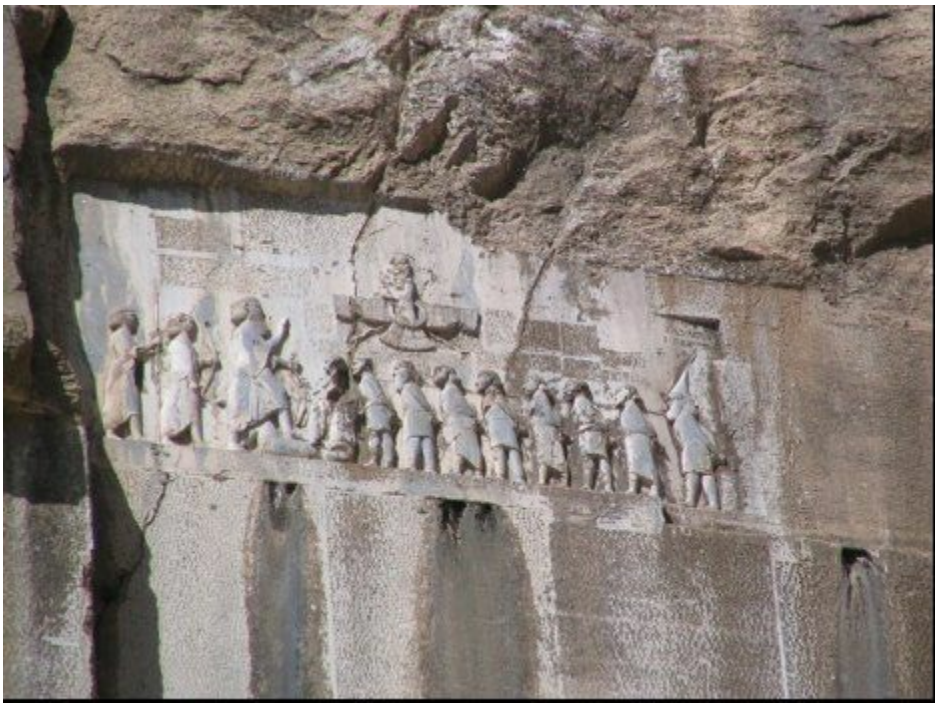
The Origin Of Archeology: A Quick And General Overview

Archeology is the science of discovering the history, culture, and remains of the older civilizations. Many people shudder at the name of history, partially because of the terrible way in which history is often taught. However, for the initiated and motivated ones, history provides an exciting avenue of knowledge. More so with biblical history and archeology.

Everyone is so familiar with the word "archeology" today that most of them are under the impression that here is a branch of science that has been developing for centuries, if not for millennia. Unfortunately, here is a science that has developed properly only in the last 200 years. Material for its development has been lying around for more than 3000 years, ignored, plundered, or even mindlessly destroyed by mindless people. For example, during the second world-war, soldiers used carvings on the Behistun Inscription for target-practice, destroying portions of it. Ironically this 100×150 feet rock-carved inscription, situated 300 feet above ground, is one of the most important and key discoveries in Archeology, secular or biblical.



Closeup of Behistun Inscription

The sheer neglect and destruction [such as for stripping stones from ancient monuments and building new structures] for millennia has been destroying

archeological sites for long. Added to it was the lure of hidden treasures. People have been using metal coins, precious metals, precious stones etc for long as the medium to store their assets. Having no banks, many have been burying these. Also, such riches were routinely buried with people in ancient civilizations. Earthquakes and volcanic eruptions often buried entire civilizations, along with their precious metals and gems. Often these were forgotten for centuries, or more, only to be unearthed by some unsuspecting soul — would become rich overnight because till recent times all countries had the official policy of "finders are keepers". Thus stories of "hidden treasures" abound in all cultures, and many would look to ancient buildings and structures only with an eye for the possible loot. As a consequence, archeological monuments became a paradise for treasure-hunters, and more so from 1500 AD and after.

Grave-robbing became an established practice, and the riches so discovered soon found themselves melted or sold in the black markets. Neither the finders nor the keepers ever paused to think about their historical value. Consequently, the grave robbers simply threw away [and destroyed] everything the found worthless for their pursuit. This caused further destruction of precious artifacts and writings, specially the writings found on perishable material.

Then in the middle ages quacks began prescribing the ground-up powder of mummies as an important ingredient of medicines, and there was great demand in Europe for mummies from Egypt. This gave further impetus to grave-robbing, establishing an international market for smuggling mummies. On top of that, by 1700, displaying large and beautiful archeological objects in their homes became a status symbol in Europe, further aggravating mindless plundering of buried ancient civilizations.

Perhaps millions of pieces of precious artifacts, writings, and other useful material were destroyed in this way, or were placed in locations so detached from the original that they became practically useless for a scientific investigation of their history. Yet, from this mindless destruction emerged one of the most fascinating sciences, and that is archeology. Today strict laws control all digging, and the finders are no longer keepers. True, grave-robbing goes on even today, but it is at a much smaller level. [Getting caught

in the act can often cost one's life]. Archeology has become a more or less mature science. Thousands of museums around the world display ancient objects much more carefully and with proper cataloging than what it used to be in the past. Many countries erect museums close to the location of the find, encouraging both tourists as well as scholars to study the objects more objectively. And the results have been gratifying.

Thus archeology is a 200-year old science, that has come about because of thousands of years of grave-robbing, sorcery, buying objects of status, and medical quackery. The results today of available discoveries are fascinating, inviting more scholars and even amateurs to get involved in digging or studies.

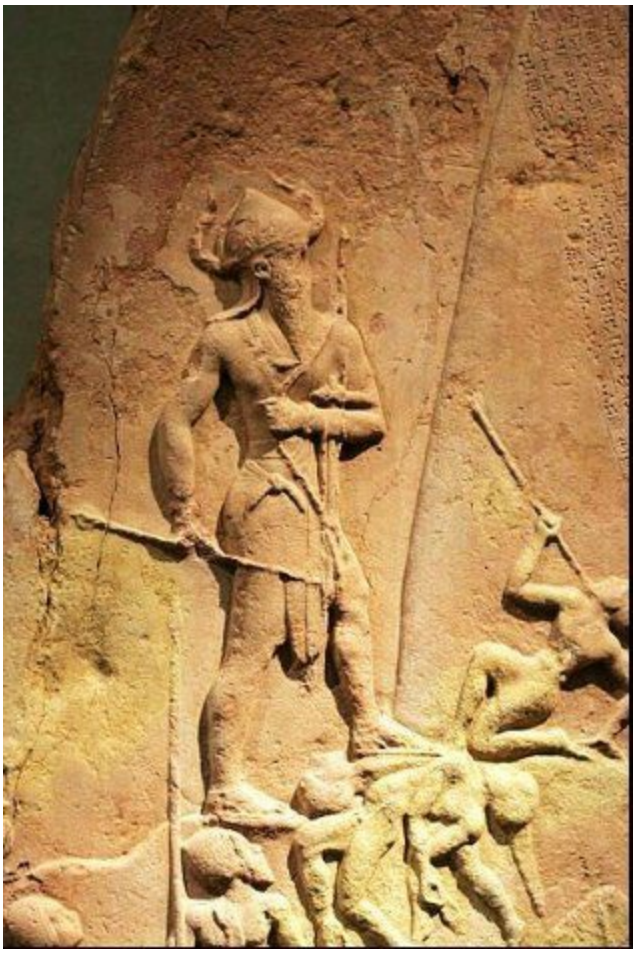
The Development Of Archeology

Archeology is the science that studies the past with the help of tangible materials from past civilizations that can be discovered today. Though the systematized form of this science is less than 200 years old, it was long in making through activities that were not exactly meant to develop this branch of science. It would be interesting to examine how it all came to be throughout fits and starts.

Earliest Archeological Activities:

According to the records available today, the earliest archeological activity took place between 1550 to 1070 BC when the Pharaohs of Egypt excavated the "Sphinx" that dated to the period of 2575 to 2134 [Old Kingdom]. Sphinx is a massive stylized lion reclining statue, with the Pharaoh's face clearly discernible on it. Based upon the the marks left by climate, tools, and humans, and also based upon the ivory carvings [from the older period] discovered in its vicinity, it has become clear that such a reconstruction was done. By the later period [1550 to 1070 BC, New Kingdom], the Sphinx was buried in sand to such a level that only its head and shoulders were visible. The restoration in the New Kingdom brought it back to its earlier glory, and it continues to attract and amaze people even in this third millennium AD.

The information about restoration of Sphinx comes mainly through deductions, and not through written documents. The earliest available written document about archeological excavation is related to Nabonidus, the last ruler of Babylon, who ruled between 555 to 539 BC. He caused the excavation of foundation stones of a building that was dedicated to Naram-Sin, who lived more than 1700 years before his time. However, he did not continue with any substantial excavation, as archeology was not yet a science, or even an object of study.



Pic: Victory stele of Naram-Sin Brought back from Sippar to Susa as war prize in the 12th century BC

People kept on excavating, but not for science but for other reasons. The chief motivation was either to destroy [such as the religion monuments of others] or to plunder, or simple human curiosity. For example, many dug into Pompeii and Herculaneum which were destroyed by overflowing lava. But since their aim was to look for riches, they only destroyed much that would be valuable for a scientific study. Finally Charles of Bourbon [king of Two Sicilies and founder of the House of Bourbon] employed Marcello Venuti to study Herculaneum. This was to be a formal investigation, and from 1738 onwards Venuti employed a large number of people for a systematic excavation. The artifacts and inscriptions thus discovered were studied in some detail. Archeology was not yet an established science, so the study was quite preliminary, but the systematic way in which it was done opened one door to the birth of objective archeology.

The 17th and 18th centuries were a time of affluence for many, and it helped them to devote their spare time to the pursuit of knowledge or fulfillment. A large number of sciences were born at this time, and Archeology also benefited by this attitude, though the birth of this science had to wait for a post-enlightenment era. One of the men touched by the spirit of Enlightenment was Thomas Jefferson in USA. In 1784 he conducted many excavations in Virginia. But this did not result in much general awareness or growth, because a large number of social science during that period were based more upon speculation and less upon hard data from the field. The speculations were in turn based upon the Eurocentric biases and prejudices of the thinkers, according which the Europeans represented the highest stage in the presumed ameba-to-man evolution. So ingrained was this assumption that for European thinkers [who dominated all learning at that time] and their blind or ignorant followers were more interested in speculations and theories than in facts.

It was more like "do not confuse me with facts". Theory dominated every area of thinking, and everything had to be subjugated to the pet theories. Speculation was enough to know truth, and nobody had to go out there to find it inscribed in stone. Thus not much work was done to develop Archeology beyond speculation. However, by the time the so-called period of "enlightenment" was over, the empirical method started gaining in prominence. This in turn helped archeology enormously.

The Nineteenth Century: The 1700s was a time when wealthy Europeans acquired uncountable antiques, a good proportion of which eventually ended up one way other in European museums. There was no system of classification, and there was no way to correlate these finds which were detached from the place of find without any objective and methodical records. By this time the growth of the empirical sciences was enough for Museum Curators to realize that the haphazard way in which these artifacts are collected and piled in museums is only destroying evidences related to antiquity.

Why So Much Importance Is Attached To Biblical Archeology

Of all the religions and faiths in the world, the Christian faith is different and unique in its historical component. While all the other religions and faiths "contain" histories, the Christian faith is "based" upon history. Even if the historical content of all other faiths is removed, their basic philosophy or substance is not affected. But this cannot be done with the Bible. Remove the historical content, and the Christian faith [and the Jewish faith] comes to a naught.

All Eastern religions are based in philosophy, and whatever history they contain [real or mythological] is only an irrelevant adjunct to the narration, or an aid to understanding the underlying philosophy. Remove the seeming historical content, and the philosophy is still there, totally independent of history. Western religions also fall into the same pattern, with the Bible-based faith being the only exception. And here lies the importance of Biblical Archeology.

Judeo-Christian believers of all the generations have understood the importance of history in Bible, and this is why teaching Bible-stories has been part of their cultural and social life. However, most of them never looked at it from a critical or destructive angle. For them this history was a given fact of their spiritual life and heritage. Radical critics of the Bible were the first to realize the depth and breadth to which the Judeo-Christian faith depended upon history, and it is they who realized for the first time that secular history and archeology can become a powerful tool of destruction in their hands. And the moment they realized this, they began to use all the available secular historical resources to attack the Bible. And it is this anit-christian lobby to which we should be thankful for opening our eyes to the possibilities of history and archeology.

Attempts To Attack The Bible In Early Christian Era: with the rise of Greek philosophy in the few centuries preceding the Christian Era. Since the Greek philosophies spanned the full spectrum from theism to atheism, the atheistic thinkers influenced by the more rational stream of the Greek philosophy found the claims of Jewish Religion [and the Christian faith that

followed] distasteful to their philosophy. The immediate reaction was to dismantle the Christian faith using the best of philosophy and rational information available at that time.

Both Jewish as well as Christian apologists rose to the task in the first three centuries of the Christian Era. Among the Jews the most well-known is Flavius Josephus, who wrote the famous "Contra Apion" [Against Apion] and several substantial volumes, almost all of which are available today. Among the Church Fathers most of them had to contend against heretics, many of whom wrote against the Bible from what can be called

One of the persons who systematically attacked the Christian faith in early centuries was the Roman pagan Porphyry, who wrote his 15-volume "Against Christians" around AD 280. He used all the historical and philosophical information that were at his disposal to attack the faith, forcing the Church Fathers also to investigate all the available secular information to defend the Christian faith. One can see references to many established points of ancient history. Here one can trace the way secular historical and archeological information was used in a rudimentary for to defend the Bible against attacks emanating from the same fields. However, archeology as a developed science did not exist then, and perhaps that was providential as people in the nineteenth century onwards had a greater need for it than those who preceded them.

From AD 400 to 1500 the Christian faith was challenged, but only occasionally and in subdued form. Thus there was no need for history-based apologetics, and perhaps in divine providence Archeology [secular or Biblical] did not see any substantial development.

Attempts During The Rise Of Radicalism: The rise of theological Radicalism in Germany, other European countries and the USA brought in the period of intensified attacks against the Bible, based upon historical sciences. Since archeology is a prime tool for the discovery of historical information, they began to press archeology more and more into their service.

The radical criticism of the 1700s to the early 1900s was more a blend of humanism, evolutionism, and rationalism and less of the hard facts of

science. Soon the evangelical Christian pointed this out, and this made the radicals all the more determined to find support from the discoveries of archeology. Some of them had an unusual confidence, unbecoming of scholars, that the future discoveries would totally dismantle the historical component of the Bible.

The Christian Response: In the face of this challenge, an increasing number of Christian [trained as well as untrained] took to primary or secondary archeology. Primary work was done by people who actually went into the field. Secondary work was done by those who used these discoveries to reconstruct ancient history. And then thousands of men trained in various branches of theology and apologetics used this information for examining the allegation of radicals and defending the Bible.

The results were almost always in favor of the Bible. There were doubts in some cases, but in the long run these turned out to be the consequence of gaps in discoveries. As they kept discovering yet new artifacts and inscriptions, the missing gaps were filled and Bible was vindicated.

The Twenty First Century: Throughout the 1900s the radical thinkers waged sort of a political war to control the world of archeology. Contrary to popular thinking, the world of science and scholarship is not always made up of objective and truth-seeking men. The world of science, in addition to knowledge, is also a world of power, position, prestige and money. And this induces many to manipulate people for their own vested interests.

A good example is the discovery and publication of the Dead-sea scrolls. Though discovered around 1947 to 48, many scholars did not publish original documents in their possession till even 1990. Nor did they give access or permission to others to publish this material. The in 1990 there was a hue and cry from scholars around the world, but it took much for some of this information to be released to public. Such is often the world of science and archeology.

In spite of the ongoing attempt by many to control information, what is already available related to the Bible is enormous. Scores of standard journals, and hundreds of magazines, and thousands of websites now carry information related to Bible and Archeology today. This trend will only

increase because the demand to show the trustworthiness of the Bible is on the increase.

A quick acceptance of anything published against the Bible and its historical accuracy is on the increase. Books that question the historicity of Lord Jesus Christ, howsoever absurd their thesis might be, quickly become bestsellers. A good example is "Christ and Krishna" written by Joseph Edamaruku, a prominent Indian Atheist. Within two decades of first publication, this book has undergone more than 10 editions in two languages. In comparison, most books die after the first edition, and less than ten percent Indian books go into a second edition. The book, due to its persuasive style, and large distribution created quite a confusion among young Christians in India. Similar results are seen when books attacking any other aspect of the Christian faith are published. However, the Christian community has been rising to the occasion and answering all allegations.

Summary: The Christian faith and its fundamental principles are so closely intermingled with history in Bible that they cannot be separated in any way. Destroy the history, and the theology is undone automatically. As a consequence, a large number of radical theologians have been attacking the historical content of the Bible. In truth this has undermined the faith of many, and challenged that of many more.

Biblical archeology examines archeology and history as it applies to the Bible, and helps in the defense of the Christian faith. Biblical archeology helps in many other ways too, and that is examined in other parts of this work.

Historical/Legal Apologetics

The Role In Apologetics Played By Archeology

One difference between the Christian faith and many other world religions is the historical nature of Bible. Though all the other religious books offer many stories, these do not claim to be histories.

Even in those places where other religions claim to be presenting actual histories, the philosophy and theology of those religions do not depend upon the historical narrative. Thus even if those historical narrative are false, or

even if they are eliminated, it makes no difference to the philosophical and theological claims of those religions. This is particularly true of all Oriental religions. But the same is not true of Bible or of the Christian faith.

The Christian faith is solidly and inseparably based upon history. If Adam, Eve, Eden, Flood, Moses, Prophets, Jesus, Pentecost, and the Apostles are eliminated from the Bible, then nothing substantial remains of Christian faith. Ultimately all the foundational, cardinal, and major Biblical doctrines depend upon the historicity of the events recorded in the Bible.

The historical nature of the Bible has been recognized by radicals and atheists much more than the Christians. They know that if this foundation can be destroyed, then the Christian faith would automatically crumble without additional effort. They have been shown to be right in the liberal churches. In these churches pastored by theological radicals, the members were told for decades that there is no historical basis for the Bible.

About five decades of such teaching, and all these churches reached the lowest level of spiritual decadence. There is today no spiritual perversion which is considered wrong by the laity or the clergy of the liberal churches. It is their offspring who that ushered in the era of promiscuity and infidelity, illegitimate children, divorce, abortion, serial marriages, and all conceivable and inconceivable sexual orgies in the western nations.

Bible-believing Christians have recognized the perils befalling the Christian if the historical basis of this faith can be shown to be invalid. Consequently, for the last two centuries many thousands of brilliant scholars have devoted their entire lives to examine, clarify, and defend the historicity of the Biblical narratives. So much so that entire disciplines of study and research have come up in seminaries, colleges, and Universities around the world as a consequence of all this. Such is the importance of historical studies for the Christian faith, and Historical Apologetics is only a small part of these historical studies. We would look the following subjects in this and the following lesson:

1-Tools Of Legal Method/Apologetics
2-Tools Of Historical Apologetics

3-Application Of The Tools
4-Other Values Of Historical Investigations

Let us study each of them in greater detail:

Tools Of Legal Apologetics

Each branch of learning has its own tools of study, methods of evaluation, and approaches to deduction. Often the methods that work in one branch do not work in another, though all of them are based upon the common foundation of logic.

Thus the tools of physics are not that of medicine, and that of mathematics are not that of history. Only in interdisciplinary studies do some of the tools overlap, and even here things are not often easy. That is the reason why very few people opt for research/teaching in interdisciplinary fields. Even many areas of Christian Apologetics are interdisciplinary in nature, and it is here that very few people work. Most of those who are interested in Apologetics prefer single disciplines like Pure Philosophical Apologetics (say, Philosophy Of Religions) or Pure Rational Apologetics (say, Bible And Science).

Legal Apologetics is a combination of Legal and Historical Reconstruction. Since it involves the Legal and Historical processes, it is necessary to understand the tools used for both of these methods. The tools of Legal Method are as follows:

1-The Legal Reconstruction Method:

Legal Apologetics deals with the legal investigation of whether a certain thing has taken place or not. Thus in court cases a large chunk of time is spent in deciding whether a certain event has taken place or not.

Information is collected from the available witnesses. They are then cross-examined to determine both their personal integrity and also to determine the integrity of their descriptions. Once all the available witnesses are cross-examined, and once all unacceptable and unestablished information is ruled out, the rest of the information is compiled into a coherent story. This story is then accepted as a reliable reconstruction of the things that transpired in relation to the events under investigation. This is the way in which Courts of Law reconstructs alleged events, and then punishes or acquits the accused.

Since the events of the Bible are historical in nature, the method of legal and historical reconstructions apply to the historical events recorded in the Bible.

Further, since the historical narratives have become the favorite target of attack for radicals and rationalists alike, the legal/historical reconstruction becomes an important tool in the hands of the Christian Apologist.

2-Sufficient And Total Proof In The Legal Method:

Most people who talk of "proof" have only the so-called "scientific proof" in their mind. However, the field of investigating truth is much broader than that of physical sciences, and therefore the methods of obtaining and assessing proof is also much broader. What is ample proof in one discipline might be totally worthless in another field, and thus it is essential to look at a few types of proofs.

In mathematics and geometry, proof consists of showing that a certain set of conditions are true of certain objects, irrespective of the type of object selected. For example, if a certain property is demonstrated to be true for a number "n" (where n can have any value whatsoever), then it is accepted as proof that this property is true for any number whatsoever. Similarly, if a certain property is shown to be true for a triangle chosen arbitrarily, then this property is assumed to be applicable for all triangles in the Universe. The same is the case with all proofs of geometry.

In scientific proof the event under consideration is repeated under various conditions and in various laboratories. If the event repeats itself under the same set of circumstances, it is assumed to be true.

In legal/historical proof it is necessary to demonstrate that an even has probably taken place beyond all doubt. It is also necessary to demonstrate that taking place of this event is the best explanation of the data available.

In all three cases above, something is accepted as true or proven if the proof available is sufficient. "Total" proof of an event means that one examines each and every conceivable possibility and establishes each one of them to be true. This is humanly never possible. Thus in a court of law, once the general truthfulness of a witness is established, his individual statements are accepted to be true. Similarly, in the case of the Bible, it is humanly not possible to verify each of the tens of thousands of historical statements. Thus, what the legal expert or the historical looks for is the general trustworthiness on those points that can be checked. If those are found to be true, it is considered

sufficient for accepting the rest are to be true.

For example, it is not possible to verify whether Abraham uttered each one of the statements attributed to him. However, if the historical existence of Abraham, the cities mentioned in connection with Abraham, and the information in general are found to be true, this is considered sufficient proof that the narratives related to Abraham are true. This is the standard procedure for proof followed in all legal and historical practices.

On the above count, the existence of Abraham, Moses, the kings of Israel and Judah, the prophets, the proclamations of the Gospel narratives, etc. are found to be sufficiently proved and demonstrated.

Tools Of Historical Apologetics

Though Legal and Historical Apologetics are intimately connected with each other, for the sake of clarity it would still be helpful to look separately at those aspects of the Apologetics where the historical aspect is very prominent.

1-Archeology:

Archaeology is a recent science and it deals with the study of ancient civilizations. Though some people had been collecting ancient artifacts for some centuries, archaeology had its birth in 1798 when Napoleon conducted a systematic study of the ancient monuments and artifacts of Egypt. From there it had a slow development till it reached its zenith and scientific form in the twentieth century.

Biblical/Secular Archaeology: Initially there was not distinction between Biblical and secular archaeology, but soon scholars realized that the archaeological discoveries in lands where Biblical history took place are of immense importance to studies of Biblical history. Thus Biblical Archaeology developed as a subset of General Archaeology. Today Biblical Archaeology has grown to such levels that several societies and journals are devoted totally and exclusively to this discipline. More details of Bible and archaeology is included in another section of this work.

Chronologies/Histories: Interest in correlating secular history and corresponding Biblical history grew towards the middle of the nineteenth century. The growth was fueled partly by the attacks of the radical theologians and rationalists who tried to use secular history to attack the reliability of the Bible. These attacks prompted Bible believing scholars to investigate the subject further. Consequently, today a vast amount of Biblical history and chronology has already been correlated with the corresponding secular history. If any uncertainty remains, it mostly because of the still incomplete knowledge of the secular history.

One area of interest has been the chronologies of kings given in the book of Kings and Chronicles. Often the statements seem to contradict each other,

and this has perplexed Bible-believing scholars. Rationalists gleefully point to these apparent contradictions, and even today their handbooks against the Bible mention these as the strongest points of attack against the Bible. However, research from the middle of the twentieth century have clarified these problem.

During the time of the Kings, Israel and Judah used at least five different types of calendar reckonings. Thus the same date would give different values according to different calendars, and this was the reason for these conflicting dates. After decades of research, often with the aid of powerful computers and algorithms, now researches have solved the riddle and there is no serious calendar problem in the books of Kings and Chronicles. This is another area in which Historical Apologetics has come to the aid of Bible believing people.

2-Dating Techniques: Discovering exactly how old an archaeological find is helps in accurate reconstruction of history. Determination of the age helps the Bible in more than one way. For example, a shroud claiming to be the burial cloth of Lord Jesus was recently shown to be only about 600 years old. Thus all false claim to its authenticity has been repudiated, and the Bible believing Christians have been saved from a historical hoax.

Age Determination takes place in many ways. One is Historical Dating. The dates of many artifacts or kingdoms are known historically, and therefore the dates of the items associated with them is assumed to be the same. Another method is Comparative Dating. The pottery shapes and styles, the use of metals, the use of building materials, etc. have changed with age. Thus by comparing these things with similar items of a known date the approximate age can be found out. The third methods is Scientific Dating. By using many scientific method, including the Radiocarbon Dating, the date of many items can be determined. This is how the date of the disputed shroud mentioned above was determined.

Date-determination is a very complex science and art, and the above paragraph has tried only to give a glimpse into this field. Suffice to say that date determination of ancient artifacts and civilizations has played a very significant role in reconstructing past history. This in turn has helped scholars to correlated Biblical history with the secular. As a consequence of all this

work, today Bible stands as historically most accurate ancient book.

3-Linguistic Studies: Bible is written in two ancient languages (Hebrew and Greek) which are no longer spoken today. Some chapters in Daniel are written in Aramaic. Ancient Hebrew, Greek and Aramaic are totally different from their modern counterparts. Consequently much linguistic investigation has been needed to understand these languages to a sufficient degree. These studies, in turn, have been greatly beneficial for Christian Apologists.

a. Biblical Languages: A History Of Studies: Eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were periods when a study of Biblical languages was revived. Much groundwork was done both by conservative as well as by radical theologians. Then the twentieth century brought a flood of literary material from the ancient world.

The Code Of Hammurabi (300 paragraphs of written material), hundreds of written clay tablets found in Ugarit, several thousand Nuzi Tablets, 20,000 written tablets at Mari, hundreds of Old Testament scrolls discovered near Dead Sea, the 22,000 written tablets and fragments found at Ebla near modern Syria, the hundreds of scrolls found at Oxryrhynchos in Egypt, etc. are some examples of the abundant written material found from Biblical lands. Written in Biblical languages and their cognates, this material helped scholars to study Biblical languages in great depth and breadth.

b. The Value Of Linguistic Studies: Linguistic studies helped a better understanding of the meaning of ancient Biblical texts like Job which contain many words used by man during the earliest period succeeding the time of Noah. Usages like "sister" for wife by Abraham, Isaac, the love in Songs of Solomon, have become clear. Similarly, much light has been thrown on word meanings.

Many of the ancient customs were totally different from what we see today. For example, Sarai’s adoption of Ishmael, Abraham’s unwillingness to send him out after Isaac’s birth, the ritual used by Eliazar to make a covenant with Abraham, etc. are things that can be understood only when their customs are understood. Only written material help in such understanding. Thus the discovery of written material and their studies have helped not only linguists, but also those who would like to study ancient customs and cultures.

Another benefit of linguistic studies has been our ability to evaluate the accuracy and authenticity of ancient manuscripts. An entire branch of science called Textual Criticism has developed for this activity. It has helped Conservative scholars to defend the authenticity of Biblical books. For example, the book of Daniel was a favorite target of radical and rationalist attacks. One of their contentions was that the presence of certain Persian words indicated that this book was written only in 100BC and not in 600BC. Scholars like the late Robert Dick Wilson were able to refute these charges using their linguistic researches.

Prof. Wilson was fluent in almost 50 languages, and could easily handle another 50. He challenged any contender to show any proof against the Bible in any language, current or dead. He even promised to learn that language if it was at that time unknown to him. Today Bible stands as a vindicated book as a consequence of these linguistic investigations.

Any manuscript that is hand-copied for thousands of years, and that also in the most unfavorable circumstances, is bound to develop some errors of copying. These include omission of a line when two lines start with the same word, repetition of words, etc. Linguistic studies have helped scholars to discover and classify the problems of copying common in Biblical languages. Then with the help of tens of thousands of manuscripts available today, they are able to reconstruct the originals with great confidence.

4-Present Status Of Manuscripts:

Critics often argue that an ancient book like the Bible cannot be reliable. They compare Bible with other ancient books, and claim that all other books contain gross errors of science, philosophy, and of concept. They also point out to the ten to twenty percent of material in these manuscripts that have become corrupt beyond recognition. They attribute the same limitations to the Bible also. But historical studies have shown that this allegation is not correct.

Conservative Christian scholars have always been conscious of the need to keep investigating the Bible at the manuscript level. They felt the need for two reasons: for a better understanding of the text, and for a stronger defense of the Bible. Due to these concerns, they have been able to discover tens of thousands of ancient manuscripts.

Today there are more than 5,300 Greek manuscripts, over 10,000 Latin manuscripts, 9,300 other early manuscripts, and more than 24,000 manuscripts of portions of the New Testament. In addition, there are thousands of Old Testament manuscripts. Portions of the New Testament manuscripts available today were produced less than two decades after Pentecost. Portions of Old Testament manuscripts available today were produced very close to the time of Malachi. There is no other ancient book in the world which has produced this kind of a witness to its reliability.

Application Of The Legal/Historical Tools

Of all the world religions, the Christian faith is one that totally and fully depends upon the reliability of the historical narratives of its Holy book. Consequently, the radical theologians and rationalists are quick to attack the historical narratives of the Bible. This is why the practice of Legal and Historical Apologetics is important for Christian Apologists.

As seen above no sooner attacks began coming against the historical aspects of the Christian faith, tools of Legal and Historical Apologetics were developed to counter it. These developments had many advantages in addition to providing a defense of the Christian faith. Some of these are:

1-Insights Into History/Chronology:

Most people do not realize that the way history is written, and the way in which chronologies are constructed, vary from culture to culture. Thus the historical and chronological records produced by people of one culture can be understood only if we understand the presuppositions and methodologies of those people. Legal and Historical studies have furnished much information to help us understand Biblical history and chronology more accurately.

2-Insights Into Culture/Customs/Manners:

Culture, customs, and manners vary from place to place and time to time even within a single country. So much so that what is considered as appropriate and even desirable behavior in one part of a country can be interpreted as undesirable in another part of the same country. Since that is the case, the Biblical history covering a span of 4000 years, having taken place in dozens of countries, contains many things related to these things that might perplex people today. Some of the Biblical statements can even be misinterpreted today. However, historical investigation furnishes insights into these things, eliminating confusion.

3-Insights Into Languages/Meanings:

As mentioned before, Biblical languages are dead today. They are not spoken anywhere. Thus it is difficult for the twentieth century reader to understand all the finer nuances of these languages when they were used by people for whom it was their native

language. Historical investigations, however, have produced tens of thousands of writings of all kinds in these languages, enabling linguists to understand vocabulary, word usage, and idioms of these languages more accurately.

4-Insights Through Reconstruction/Investigation of Biblical Histories/Incidents: Many events become more meaningful to the readers when the background is reconstructed more fully to them. This is the reason why popular magazines sometimes carry detailed reconstructions of historical events like the sinking of Titanic, or the fist voyage to the North Pole. Historical and Legal investigations have helped Bible scholars to perform similar reconstructions of many Biblical events (siege of Jericho, fall of Persian Empire, etc), providing greater insights into the significance and impact of these events.

Other Values Of Historical Investigations

Though the purpose of Apologetics is defense of the Christian Faith, Apologetic investigations always help the entire spectrum of Biblical studies. For example, in addition to the benefits mentioned previously, Historical investigations provide help in many other areas of Bible studies and research. Some of them are:

1-A Better Understanding of Biblical Text/Transmission: The way the Biblical Text was produced, preserved, and transmitted has an exciting history of itself. Often this can shed much light for those who investigate the accuracy of the current text of Bible. Further, when radicals and rationalists claim that the present text is unreliable, such studies help scholars to refute them. For example, when a radical claims that a certain translation of the Old Testament contained the Apocrypha Books also, such studies help scholars to show that they were not part of the Canon.

2-Better Appreciation Of Reliability Of Scriptures: The historical nature of Bible and the Christian faith has prompted radicals and rationalists to attack all historical aspects of the Christian faith, including the reliability of the Hebrew and Greek Texts that are available today. However, venturing into the history of these things not only vindicates the accuracy of the present texts, but also fills Christians with awe about the ways in which God caused this text to be transmitted so reliably for His children.

3-Better Appreciation Of Prophecy: Most of the prophecies recorded in the Bible have already taken place. Thus it is often very difficult for the present-day reader to appreciate their apologetic value. But when historical studies demonstrate how incredible these prophecies were at the time of their giving, our appreciation for prophecy increases manifold. (This subject is discussed in detail in another portion of this series).

Summary: Unlike the major world religions, the Christian faith is firmly rooted in history. There is no way to separate the historical portions from

doctrinal ones. Either both of them stand together, or they fall totally. This is why the historical narratives in the Bible have become favorite targets of attack for theological radicals and rationalists. Legal and Historical Apologetics is the answer to these people. History has turned out to be a great friend of the Bible and the Legal and Historical apologetics have turned out to be very strong answers against all objections !

BIBLICAL ARCHEOLOGY

Volume 4
Discovery Of Important Inscriptions

Dr. Johnson C. Philip,
Dr. Saneesh Cherian

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Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III

Discovery Of Important Inscriptions

Archeology depends upon artifacts discovered from the ancient worlds for its task of reconstruction. It must never be forgotten that “reconstruction” is needed because in the present one know either very little, or even nothing at all, about the details of the ancient civilizations that one wishes to study. This was more so in the early stages of archeology when almost nothing was known about the ancient civilization, except what was known from the Bible or from secondary sources. However, the discovery of artifacts puts some boundaries on archeologists.

Artifacts are “objects” from the ancient world, but it is not always possible to interpret the purpose and role of “objects”. These may correspond in appearance with many things in the present world, but might have totally different purpose. Other objects might totally be different from the presently used object with which it shares something in common. The big question is, once you discover an object that may or may not look familiar, how do you interpret them. For example, if you find human and animal bones mingled in a cave, how do you interpret their interrelationship. Were the humans consumed by carnivorous animals who eventually perished in that cave, or were the animals hunted and consumed by the humans who finally died in the cave?

Or suppose a graveyard is found with scores of jars each with the skeletons of a little child. How does one interpret them. Do we interpret them as burial as part of human sacrifice? What justification can we give for such a deduction. This can also be the burial site for children who fell victims of, say smallpox. Since no flesh is preserved, all traces of smallpox, or plague or any other fatal disease, would almost be non-existent. Since children are buried in many civilizations in ways different from the way adults are buried, this is a definite possibility in times of plague.

A very interesting example from India comes to my mind. As of today I am in my early sixties. I live in a large cosmopolitan town. During my social visits, I often notice highly ornamental flower-vases displayed in rich houses, totally different from what is commonly seen. Many of them have purchased

these from antique-sellers at great price, and therefore they are an object of pride as well as symbol of status in the twenty-first-century cosmopolitan families. And almost none of the children know anything about these objects of beauty other than that they are antiques. If allowed to describe, they would describe these only as antique flower-vases only. However, they would be horrified to find the truth.

A Spittoon The Looks Like A Flower-vase

These antiques were used by people in Kerala, India, up to the middle of the 1900s as spittoons. Chewing tobacco was common in this state. Further, the moist climate of this state created copious amounts of phlegm among those who did so. Since the people were very conscious of hygiene, they would not spit here and there. Rather they used these spittoons which were emptied at dump-sites in their own large fields.

Further, metal-working [or any kind of handicraft] had risen to very high levels of perfection in this state, and as a consequence even the humble spittoon was highly symmetrical and ornate. However, just five decade after their used dropped from common life, the new generation discovered them in their attics or from antique-shops and began giving them the most honored position in their living-rooms, mainly because the shape and size corresponds today to objects used for purposes totally different from what it was

originally meant for. Only a person who has seen them in use would be able to fully enlighten people as to what these are.

Thus almost all major archeological finds can be interpreted in more than one way, and there needs to be something better than mere informed conjecture to cross-check the information with. And here comes the importance of inscriptions. The only objective solution is for someone from that culture to come and explain their culture, customs, philosophies, aspirations, and artifacts to us. This looks impossible, but precisely this has happened through inscriptions, clay/stone tablets, and other kinds of written documents.

The Importance Of Written Documents: A person contemporary with a society, and an integral part of it, is the best one to tell us the story of that civilization. No amount of deduction and speculation by people removed several millennia from him can be as accurate or as authentic as his statement.

Except for the twentieth century, writing material has never been as abundant in any other time in human history. Even in the twenty-first century, paper is not easily accessible to a large segment of population. Thus thinking of "writings" and inscriptions in civilizations four to six thousand years in the past looks ridiculous. Yet man has been a compulsive writer. In spite of the difficulty in getting materials, and in spite of the difficulty in the process of writing, people of the ancient civilizations have left such a vast collection of written material that it is impossible even to read and study all of them.

Written material from the past was discovered by many even in ancient times, but none had any clue as to what it meant, so they simply ignored such material. Many of the ancient statues, temples, and other such buildings also had inscriptions, but for most people [and even for scientists] they were more of a curiosity than something of lasting value. So much so that even in 1800s and 1900s people actively working in the fields of archeology and professional archeological societies kept ignoring inscriptions. Consequently, in 1700s and 1800s many smaller inscriptions were simply thrown away by archeologists who discovered them. Larger inscriptions and manuscripts were stored in museums as things of lesser value, and little specific attention was paid to them. One reason was that none knew how to read them, and the task of deciphering them did not look sufficiently rewarding to many. And all this

set archeological progress back by centuries.

It was only in the late 1800s and early 1900s that few individuals recognized the importance of written material for archeology. However all of them were faced with the task of deciphering the unknown scripts, languages which were not spoken for 2500 to 3000 years or more from the present era. Obviously, no living or dead person for the last two to three millennia had any idea of how these languages were read. Yet, as an increasing number of scholars and amateurs realized the importance of inscriptions, they kept working on deciphering the ancient languages.

Eventually there were many breakthroughs. Painstaking work from 10 to 25 years helped them to crack one language, and then another. Eventually a good number of languages spoken in Bible lands became accessible to scholars worldwide. This resulted in a large volume of translated material that in turn helped scholars and researchers to reconstruct history, sociology, laws, customs, and numerous other things about the ancient world.

Certain key finds helped in deciphering the ancient languages of the Biblical lands. Certain other key finds helped in understanding the basic chronology, geography, and interrelationship of many of these cultures. All of these put together gave researchers the tools needed to reconstruct the past. Of such discoveries, the most important writings are briefly listed below. Detailed information about each of these discoveries is given separately.

Important Discoveries [Writings/Inscriptions]: Discoveries from around the world have helped each others to advance archeology, but certain discoveries from countries in the Middle East have contributed the most to the development of archeology that helps Bible students. These are, Egypt, Mesopotamia, Asia Minor, Syria, and Palestine. Some of the important documents discovered in these countries are:

Writings From Egypt: These include [among others], what are known as the Rosetta Stone, the Tell el-Amarna Letters, the Stela of Merneptah, the Elephantine Papyri, and the Sinai Inscriptions [from outside Egypt].

Writings From Mesopotamia: These include [among others], Behistun Inscription, the Creation and Deluge Tablets [Epic of Creation, Sippar Tablet,

Gilgamesh Epic, Nippur Tablet, other generally unnamed but important tablets from Nineveh, Nippur, Kish, etc], the Code of Hammurabi, the Mari Tablets, the Nuzi Tablets, the Records of Shalmaneser [his Monolith, Bronz Plates, Black Obelisk, etc], Annals of Tiglath-Pileser III, Cylinder of Sargon II, Cylender of Sennacherib, Archives of Ashurbanipal, Babylonian Chronicle

Records From Syria: These include [among others], the Ras Shamra Tablets, the Gebal Inscriptions, the Dog River Gallery

Records From Palestine: These include [among others], the Lachish Letters, the Siloam Inscription, the Samaria Ostraka, the Moabite Stone, the Gezer Agricultural Tablet, the Lachish Ewer.

The above is only a sample list, mostly of early discoveries, and not exhaustive in any way. These and many others will be introduced in detail in other portions of this work.

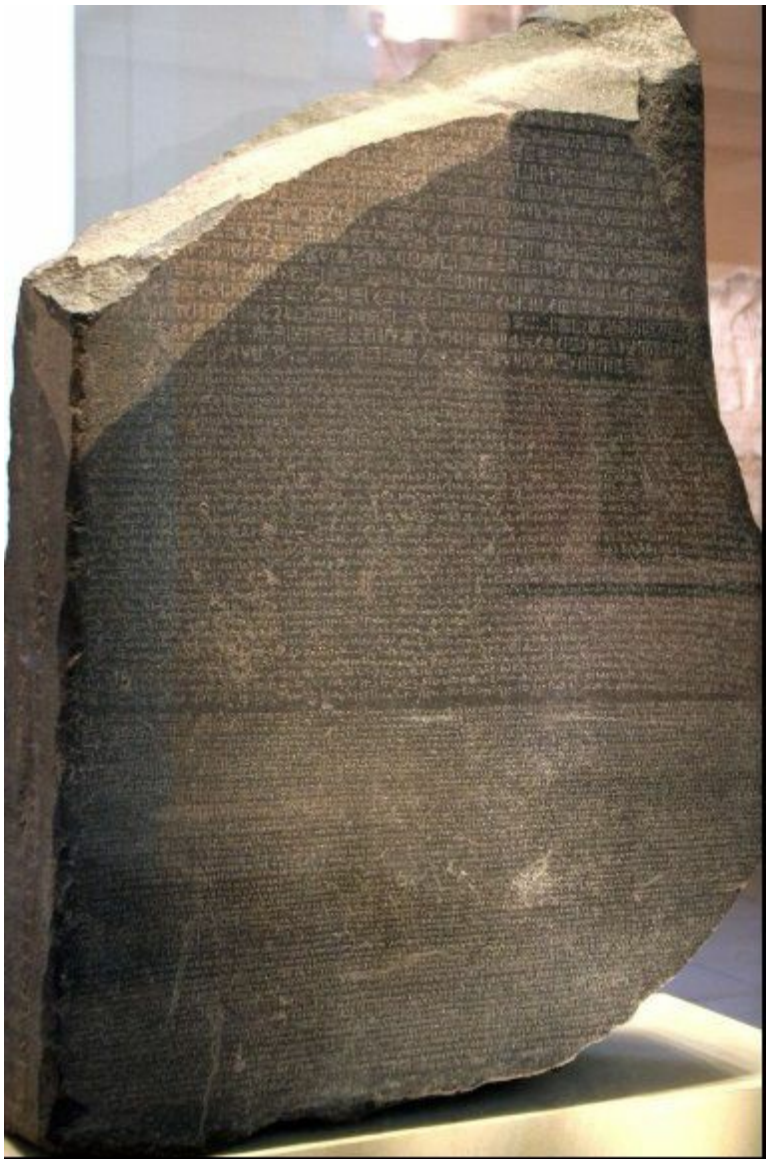
The Rosetta Stone

Background, History, Deciphering, And Significance Of The Find

Of all the finds that can be called “keys” to the ancient languages, the Rosetta Stone occupies a very high position. The story is very fascinating, and is sketched below at some length along with much background information.

Background:

Egypt was one of the most prosperous, technologically oriented, and literate countries in the ancient world. Scribes were held in very high esteem, and the people and the rulers of Egypt managed to leave copious amounts of written materials. Soft varieties of stones were available in plenty, which were hewn in geometrical shapes, with plain surfaces, and the surface was inscribed with history, stories, or any other information they cared to chisel on to it. Stone being infinitely more rugged than paper, the volume of inscriptions that became available from Egypt is more than the total output of all the contemporary nations put together.

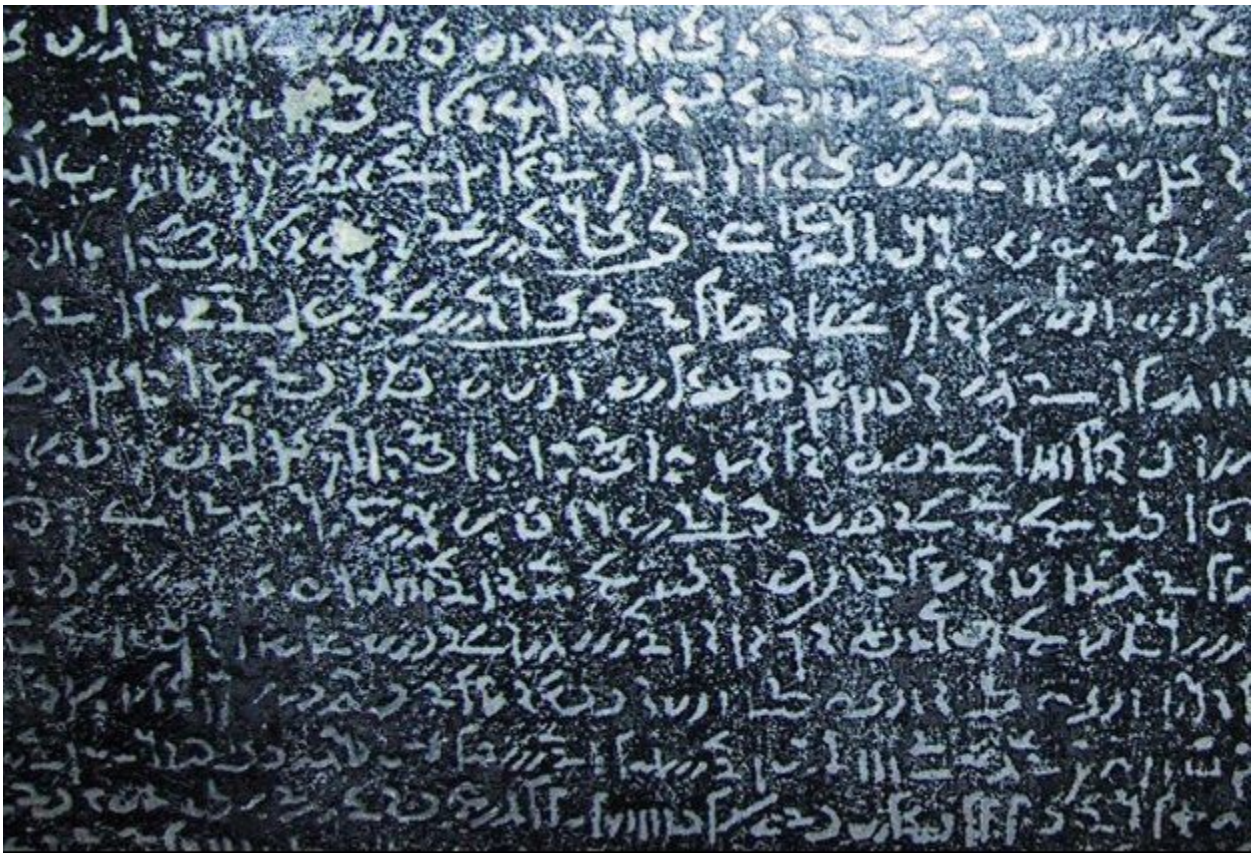


Rosetta Stone By Nina Aldin Thune

A large number of Egyptian inscriptions in stone, practically imperishable, remained visible for thousands of years. But both the people of Egypt as well as outsiders almost completely forgot their language by the time of Christ. This happened when the Egyptians were influenced first by Persian intruders, then by Greek conquerors under Alexander, and then by the Romans. In 323 BC that the empire was divided after the death of Alexander, and Egypt fell to Ptolemy I, who was also called Pharaoh Ptolemy I. This was the last great Egyptian dynasty [32nd] and all of his male successors were called Ptolemy and all of his female succors were called Cleopatra.

The Ptolemies were Greeks who ruled Egypt for a very long time. They kept

building temples in Egyptian style, but their language and lifestyle was exclusively Greek. As a consequence with the rise of Ptolemies, Greek began to dominate, with Egyptian still being used here and there but gradually falling out of use. Once the Romans conquered them, Latin became the prominent language, with an occasional Greek. Within a hundred years of Roman dominion, the Egyptian language fell dead. So much so that none was able to understand anything of the Egyptian, and some of the Roman thinkers even went so far as to claim that these inscriptions were only some kind of decoration and not in any way connected to any language. Since the pictorial language was made up of pictures resembling many real objects, it was natural for this viewpoint to go unchallenged. All was then forgotten for a long time, till the medical doctors developed a fascination for mummies.



Demotic Script From A Replica Of Rosetta Stone, By Chris 73

In the Middle Ages, bitumen with ground up mummies, was a widely used cure for many ailments. This set up a big ring of smuggling from Egypt into Europe of excavated mummies. Obviously, the grave-robbers often came across things other than mummies. Often much more valuable than the

mummies, these were also other discoveries such as artifacts made up of precious metals and stones. These artifacts found eager buyers in Europe, and with time Egyptian antiquities became a status symbol in Europe. With this there was an increased demand, now for attractive and displayable artifacts. This in truth brought a large number of artifacts with inscriptions to Europe.

With the rise of love for knowledge, many in Europe tried their hand upon discovering the Egyptian civilization. Hieroglyphics also received due attention, and unlike the Romans, many of them recognized them as picture-languages. However, the alphabet, vocabulary, and language was not so totally forgotten that only a miracle could give them a breakthrough. In 1633 a highly learned Jesuit priest named Anthanasius Kircher, who had a background in humanities, science, languages, and religion was finally able to decipher one word. The word was “autocrat” and he translated the world from Egypt by substituting ideas for the images that represented this word. This was a great beginning to decipher the Egyptian Hieroglyphics.

A vigorous debate ensued among scholars in 1600s and 1700s about the nature and purpose of Hieroglyphics. Some still maintained that they are not a language. However, most of them came to the conclusion that it is a picture-based language where the pictures represent real objects, symbols, or ideas. There was considerable debate as to whether they could also be considered as alphabets of the language.

Meanwhile, the interest in ancient civilizations was growing, and such study was becoming part of the mainstream. Some people thus began taking a deeper interest in ancient civilizations, one whom as Napoleon. And finally it was a discovery by one of his men which finally unlocked the mystery of Egyptian Hieroglyphic, and related scripts. The Rosetta Stone was the key to this breakthrough.

The Discovery Of Rosetta Stone:

In 1998 he troops went to Egypt for battle with the British who then controlled Egypt. He took 1000 civilians with him, of whom 167 were scientists, technicians, mathematicians, and artists. Their job was to study the art, architecture, and culture of Egypt during what was labeled “and extended vacation”. Napoleon reminded that several millennia of history is looking at them as they look upon the pyramids and monuments of Egypt.

The group did a thorough study, and from 1809 to 1828 published a 19-volume work called “Description of Egypt”. The books contained plenty of pictures and comments, and their circulation in Europe created a strong interest in Egypt and its antiquity. The stage was set for a new chapter in Archeology.

Back in Egypt, the soldiers paid little attentions to things related to Archeology, and indiscriminately dug up stones from pervious constructions for building/strengthening forts for their own purposes. In 1799, while working this way on the extension of a fortress near Rosetta [or Rashid, a small city near Alexandria] they stumbled upon a large stone with ancient inscriptions. It was a black basalt stone, three feet nine inches long, two feet four inches wide, and eleven inches thick. The black stone contained writing in three distinct languages, one after another. This was eventually called the Rosetta Stone. A portion of the upper section was missing, but a thorough search did not yield any result.

Providentially, the stone fell into the hands of Pierre-Francois Bouchar, a young French officer. Though he was unable to understand the writings, he felt it might be of quite some importance, the stone was sent to Cairo. There the scholars brought by Napoleon noticed that the stone contains inscriptions in Hieroglyphics, followed by Demotic [an easier script used later in Egypt, having great affinity to the Coptic language], followed by ancient Greek.

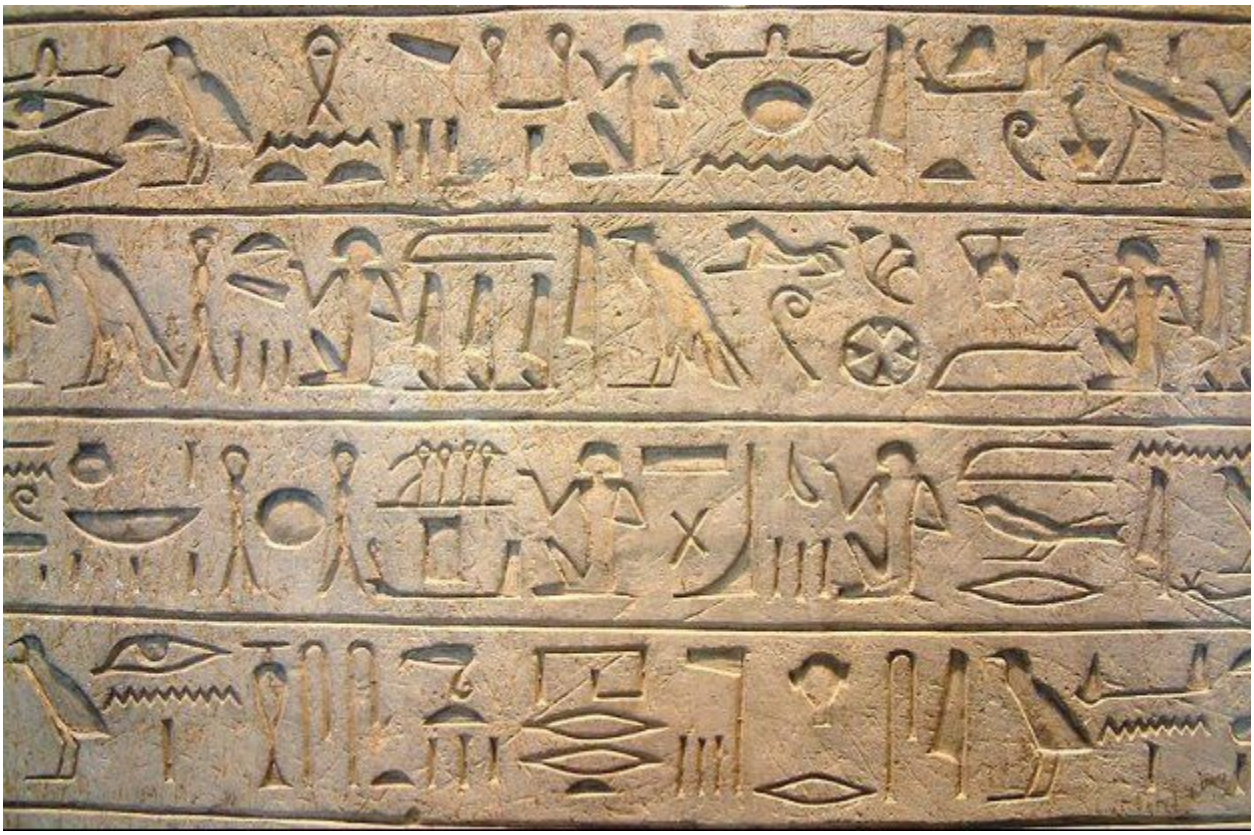
At Cairo Napoleon’s scholars were able to read the lowest, Greek, inscriptions without much difficulty. On doing so, the last statement caught their attention. It said “this decree shall be inscribed on a stela of hard stone in sacred [hieroglyphics], native [demotic], and Greek characters”. This alerted the French scholars to the possibility of some breakthrough in deciphering the dead languages. Napoleon then gave orders for copies of the trilingual inscription to be sent to Paris. Techniques of making accurate impressions of such inscriptions was were already available, so copies were sent to Paris. Scholars in many places were also able to obtain the impressions for study. Soon the scholarly world realized that this inscription might hold the key to the lost language of the Egyptians, and work began in earnest. However, it turned out to be more difficult that anyone could have

guessed, but the end result was tremendously rewarding.

Meanwhile Rosetta Stone itself went through a sojourn of itself. One of Napoleon's men acquired it as a souvenir, and it became a family property in Europe. The scholarly world had lost track of the original stone. It was passed on to several generations as a possession of one of their granddads. Eventually it was sold in a junk market, where an Oxford professor of Egyptology holidaying in France spotted it. He acquired it, brought to Oxford and showed it to to many. They were able to get some breakthrough, but none could decipher the hieroglyphics. The stone remained in the college for many years, when finally an under graduate student happened to examine it. He was stunned to notice that the stone contained the same passage inscribed in three languages, and hence possibly contained the key to Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Today the stone rests, with proper respect, in the British Museum.

A History Of Deciphering The Rosetta Stone: After Napoleon's scholars made an informal translation of the Greek text, they sent the text as well as impressions of the stones to scholars in France, and soon it reached the scholarly community in the rest of the Europe. Reverend Stephen Weston produced the first scholarly and formal translation, and presented it in a meeting of the Society of Antiquaries in London in April 1802. During the same year, the French orientalist Sylvestre de Sacy started working on the Demotic Script.



Hieroglyphic Script

The Egyptians had used hieroglyphic script for almost 3500 years, till the arrival of the Greek pharaohs. It was a tough language, with a minimum of 1000 alphabets. At the peak they had as many as 6000 symbols used as alphabet. Once Greek began to be used widely in Egypt, a simplified form of the Egyptian language evolved, often called the Demotic. It was a script using Greek alphabet, with seven additional characters derived from hieroglyphics. In this form it was known as Coptic. This had many similarities with modern Coptic, and that helped the scholars. At the same time it should not be forgotten that only the script was Greek, and the language was the unknown Egyptian. Thus a straightforward understanding was not easily possible.

The Demotic Script: Sylvestre de Sacy began his work with the assumption that the cursively written demotic script was alphabetic in nature. Alphabetic languages have a sound associated with each alphabet, while pictographic languages have a meaning associated with each symbol. Using this assumption, he tried first to identify proper names in the demotic script that

corresponded to the already identified proper names in Greek.

This was easier said than done as the correspondence between the demotic and Greek was mostly in name and not in pronunciation. Further, they did not have spacing between words, or punctuation marks between sentences, leaving the scholar to decide where to break each word. The mistake of just one symbol would throw the whole study off course. Finally he was able to identify the names of Ptolemy and Alexander, but was unable to identify the pronunciation of individual letters in this name and gave up.

John Akerblad, a Swedish diplomat and a pupil of de Sacy then began working on the demotic, and made some more breakthroughs. He knew modern Coptic language, which was used by the Coptic Church of Egypt. He was able to identify all the proper names that occurred in the Greek letters used in the demotic script, and from them constructed a "demotic alphabet" of twenty-nine letters. Using this alphabet, he was able to identify some words such as him, his, temple, and love. By doing this he also demonstrated that the demotic script was was phonetic, and that it was translatable. This was a great breakthrough, and eventually half of the alphabets identified by him stood the test of time. The only serious error made him was his assumption that the entire demotic script was alphabetic, and later breakthroughs corrected this error. However, this happened only AFTER they hieroglyphic script was deciphered.

Akerblad, de Sacy, and even Jean-Francois Champollion contributed much to decipher the demotic script, but none was able to get the final and complete breakthrough. The person who made the final breakthrough was the German scholar Heinrich Karl Brugsch. After years of research, he published a complete translation of the demotic writing in 1850.

2. The Hieroglyphic Text: A copy of the Rosetta Stone came to the attention of the British physicist Dr. Thomas Young, who took deep interest in deciphering the scripts. In the light of previous work and their inability to get a complete breakthrough, he made the following assumptions:

1. At least some of the demotic signs were NOT alphabetic
2. Some of the demotic signs were simpler derivatives of hieroglyphic signs
3. The Egyptian characters for Ptolemy would have the same sound as the

Greek letters

He began developing his work on the basis of the above assumptions. He was successful in determining that foreign names could not be represented by pure pictographic or idiographic symbols because symbols are based upon the regional words used in a language. Thus foreign names had to be spelled phonetically. On the basis of this he assumed that the cartouches, characters enclosed in an oval boundaries, must be proper names of foreigners, spelled phonetically. Using these assumption he was able to decipher five cartouches. Publication of this information had far-reaching results in deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics.

Meanwhile he was able to get help from an obelisk excavated at Philae in 1815. On this obelisk he was able to identify the hieroglyphic symbols for Bernice and Cleopatra. This in turn helped him to establish a partial "alphabet" for the hieroglyphic script. He could not make any more progress due to his [and the contemporary] wrong assumption that the demotic and hieroglyphic scripts were primarily symbolic languages where the picture of a hawk refers to a hawk and so on.

Finally the young French linguist Jean-Francois Champollion is the one who was able to crack the Egyptian hieroglyphics. He was 18 years old when he started his working 1808, and it took him 14 years to study to conclude his work in 1822. He based hi work on the following brilliant assumptions:

1. The later Egyptian Coptic script represented the final stage of the ancient language of the pharaohs.

2. Hieroglyphs were used both as ideograms [pictures that represent a concept or thing] and as phonograms [pictures that represent sounds].

3. Hieroglyphs enclosed in a cartouche [an oval shaped loop encircling a group of hieroglyphs] were phonetic transcriptions of the Pharaoh's names.

Many others had come to the same or similar conclusions, but none of them had come to the complete framework laid down by Champollion. Further the erroneous assumptions of earlier researchers interfered with the correct assumptions they had made. Champollion was able to use the collective

wisdom of his forerunners and hindsight to come to the best possible assumptions. He knew Coptic, so by looking at the demotic script [Old Coptic] of the text, he was able to figure out what the seven demotic signs in coptic were. He then used these to study their corresponding symbols in hieroglyphics, and that was the first breakthrough. Each insight helped him to inch into the text, and finally he was able to read almost the whole of the hieroglyphic. In 1822 new inscriptions from a temple of Abu Simbel on the Nile came to Europe, and Champollion was able to correctly identify the name of the Pharaoh Ramses who had built the temple.

The result of the breakthrough was announced in 1822 in a letter he sent to the French Royal Academy of Inscriptions. In this letter he explained basic concepts of the hieroglyphic scripts, and the world of Egyptology has never been the same after that. Utilizing his knowledge of Coptic he continued to translate the hieroglyphics, making the art of deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics ever more accurate.

The Scientific Value Of The Rosetta Stone:

Studying ancient civilizations related to the Bible has become a compelling need for Christians. On the other hand, it is a compelling hobby for lovers of knowledge. But both of them need breakthroughs in critical areas if they have to objectively interpret what now remains from these objectively.

Inscriptions from a culture furnish the most objective information. Further, they preserve for us what cannot be seen in artifacts, such as history of the nation. However, the languages of almost all ancient civilizations is already dead. Even the language in which the New Testament was written is no longer spoken anywhere. Thus nobody can read the inscriptions unless one is able to decipher them.

Though a vast number of inscriptions from Egypt were available, it became possible to read them only because of the Rosetta Stone. Thus it has a very high position in the annals of archeology.

A Note On Hieroglyphic Inscriptions

Hieroglyphs are signs that indicate sound [called phonograms] or even complete words [called ideograms]. Like the ancient Hebrew, it used only consonants. Thus “in the beginning God” would look like “NTHBGNNNGGD” in these languages, making the task of reading [and deciphering] extremely difficult. The task becomes all the more difficult when only the same consonants are there for more than one word without vowels. For example in such a language GD can represent God, good, goad etc. Since the context in which a certain ancient Egyptian record was produced in not always known, it is difficult to find the right word out of the possible words. Fortunately the Egyptians did have a way indicating the difference, using symbols that are now called the determinatives.

Hieroglyphic inscriptions usually written in rows from right to left. However, some wrote from left to right, and even in vertical columns, making the task of reading difficult for modern researchers. The direction towards which animals or people faced usually told the direction of writing but it was not followed strictly. Three kinds of hieroglyphic scripts were used by the Egyptians:

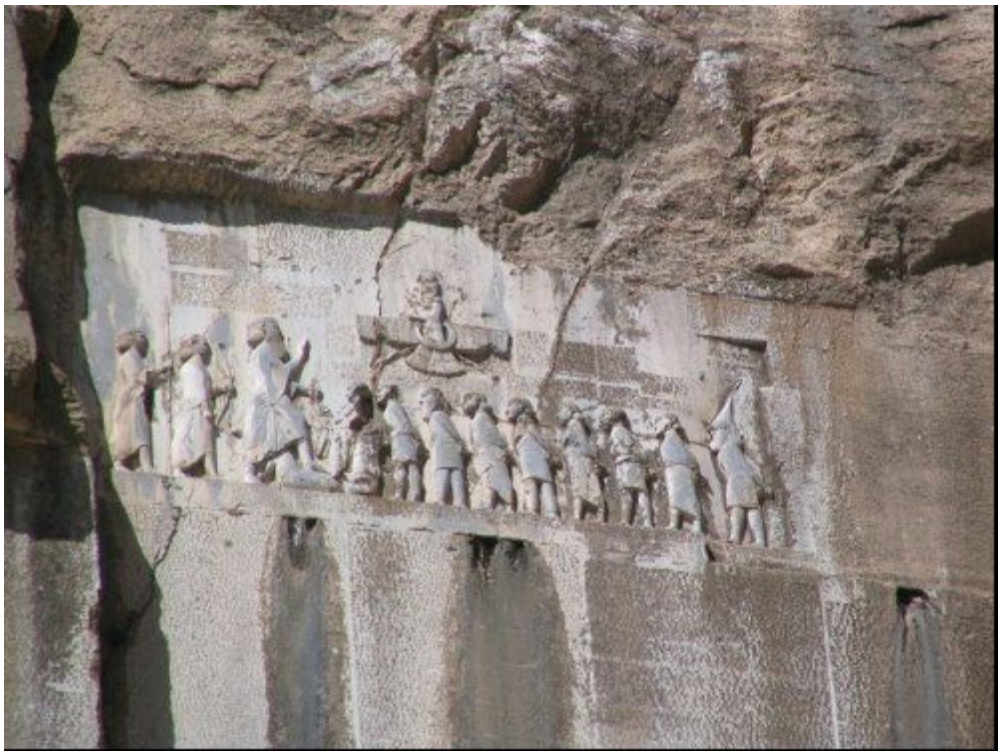
Hieroglyphs: this was a formal script, used for inscriptions on tombs, temples, commemorative stall, official or religious dedications, etc.

Hieratic: this was a simpler, cursive, form of hieroglyphs. It was easier and faster to write in this script, so it was employed liberally in everyday administrative and business writings.

Demotic: this was a popular version of the script. During the reign of the pharaoh Ptolemies, [330 BC to 20 BC], this became the most common form of Egyptian-language writing. Thus it is the second script on the Rosetta stone, immediately after the hieroglyphic writing.

The Behistun Inscription

The Behistun Inscription (also Bisitun or Bisutun, Modern Persian: بیستون ; Old Persian: Bagastana, meaning “the god’s place or land”) is a multi-lingual inscription located on Mount Behistun in the Kermanshah Province of Iran, near the town of Kermanshah.



The Behistun Inscription

The inscription includes three versions of the same text, written in three different cuneiform script languages: Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian. A British army officer, Henry Rawlinson, had the inscription transcribed in two parts, in 1835 and 1843. Rawlinson was able to translate the Old Persian cuneiform text in 1838, and the Elamite and Babylonian texts were translated by Rawlinson and others after 1843. Babylonian was a later form of Akkadian: both are Semitic languages. In effect, then, the inscription is to cuneiform what the Rosetta Stone is to Egyptian hieroglyphs: the document most crucial in the decipherment of a previously lost script.

A Closeup Drawing Of The Behistun Inscription

The inscription is approximately 15 metres high by 25 metres wide, and 100 metres up a limestone cliff from an ancient road connecting the capitals of Babylonia and Media (Babylon and Ecbatana). It is extremely inaccessible as the mountainside was removed to make the inscription more visible after its completion. The Old Persian text contains 414 lines in five columns; the Elamite text includes 593 lines in eight columns and the Babylonian text is in 112 lines. The inscription was illustrated by a life-sized bas-relief of Darius, holding a bow as a sign of kingship, with his left foot on the chest of a figure lying on his back before him. The prostrate figure is reputed to be the pretender Gaumata. Darius is attended to the left by two servants, and ten one-meter figures stand to the right, with hands tied and rope around their necks, representing conquered peoples. Faravahar floats above, giving his blessing to the king. One figure appears to have been added after the others were completed, as was (oddly enough) Darius' beard, which is a separate block of stone attached with iron pins and lead.

In Ancient History: The first historical mention of the inscription is by the Greek Ctesias of Cnidus, who noted its existence some time around 400 BC, and mentions a well and a garden beneath the inscription dedicated by Queen Semiramis of Babylon to Zeus (the Greek analogue of Ahura Mazda). Tacitus also mentions it and includes a description of some of the long-lost ancillary monuments at the base of the cliff, including an altar to Hercules. What has been recovered of them, including a statue dedicated in 148 BC, is consistent with Tacitus' description. Diodorus also writes of "Bagistanon" and claims it was inscribed by Queen Semiramis.

After the fall of the Persian Empire and its successors, and the fall of

cuneiform writing into disuse, the nature of the inscription was forgotten and fanciful origins became the norm. For centuries, instead of being attributed to Darius — one of the first Persian kings — it was believed to be from the reign of Chosroes II of Persia — one of the last.

A legend arose that it had been created by Farhad, a lover of Chosroes' wife, Shirin. Exiled for his transgression, Farhad is given the task of cutting away the mountain to find water; if he succeeds, he will be given permission to marry Shirin. After many years and the removal of half the mountain, he does find water, but is informed by Chosroes that Shirin had died. He goes mad, throws his axe down the hill, kisses the ground and dies. It is told in the book of Chosroes and Shirin that his axe was made out of a Pomegranate tree, and where he threw the axe a Pomegranate tree grew with fruit that would cure the ill. Shirin is not dead, naturally, and mourns upon hearing the news.

A More Recent Picture

Translation: The inscription was noted by an Arab traveler, Ibn Hawqal, in the mid-900s, who interpreted the figures as a teacher punishing his pupils. It was not until 1598, when the Englishman Robert Sherley saw the inscription

during a diplomatic mission to Persia on behalf of Austria, that the inscription first came to the attention of western European scholars. His party came to the conclusion that it was a picture of the ascension of Jesus with an inscription in Greek.

Erroneous interpretations by Europeans were rife for the next two centuries. French General Gardanne thought it showed Christ and his twelve apostles, and Sir Robert Ker Porter thought it represented the 12 tribes of Israel and Shalmaneser of Assyria. Italian explorer Pietro della Valle visited the inscription in the course of a pilgrimage in around 1621, and German surveyor Carsten Niebuhr visited in around 1764 while exploring Arabia and the middle east for Frederick V of Denmark, publishing a copy of the inscription in the account of his journeys in 1777. Niebuhr's transcriptions were used by Georg Friedrich Grotefend and others in their efforts to decipher the Old Persian cuneiform script. Grotefend had deciphered ten of the 37 symbols of Old Persian by 1802.

Eventually other scholars built their work upon it and came to a full understanding. This work helped to find the equivalence between Old Persian, Elamite, and Babylonian, opening up yet another chapter in reading ancient documents in these languages.

The Mesha Stele

The Mesha Stele (popularized in the 19th century as the “Moabite Stone”) is a black basalt stone, bearing an inscription by the 9th century BC Moabite King Mesha, discovered in 1868 at Dhiban (biblical “Dibon,” capital of Moab). The inscription of 34 lines is written in the Moabite language. It is the most extensive inscription ever recovered that refers to ancient Israel. It was set up by Mesha, about 850 BC, as a record and memorial of his victories in his revolt against the Kingdom of Israel, undertaken after the death of his overlord, Ahab.

Mesha Stele Or Moabite Stone

The stone is 124 cm high and 71 cm wide and deep, and rounded at the top. It was discovered at the ancient Dibon now Dhiban, Jordan, in August 1868, by Rev. F. A. Klein, a German missionary in Jerusalem. “The Arabs of the neighborhood, dreading the loss of such a talisman, broke the stone into pieces; but a squeeze had already been obtained by Charles Simon Clermont-

Ganneau, and most of the fragments were recovered and pieced together by him". A squeeze is a papier-mâché impression. The squeeze (which has never been published) and the reassembled stele (which has been published in many books and encyclopedias) are now in the Louvre Museum.

Contents: The stele, which measures 44″x27″, describes the following:

1. How Moab was conquered by Omri, King of Israel, as the result of the anger of the god Chemosh. Mesha's victories over Omri's son (not mentioned by name), over the men of Gad at Ataroth, and at Nebo and Jehaz;

2. His public buildings, restoring the fortifications of his strong places and building a palace and reservoirs for water; and

3. His wars against the Horonaim.

This inscription can be interpreted as supplementing and corroborating the history of King Mesha recorded in 2 Kings 3:4-27, thereby earning it a prominent place in the corpus of Biblical archaeology. However there are significant differences. In the Bible it is Ahab, Omri's son, who conquers Moab, and the rebellion is against Ahab's son Jehoram. Further, in the Bible, it is not Chemosh who gives victory to Mesha but Jahweh who gives victory to Jehoram. Israel withdraws, according to the Book of Kings, only because they are disconcerted when they see Mesha sacrifice his son.

With the exception of a very few variations, such as -in for -im in plurals, the Moabite language of the inscription shares much in common with an early form of Hebrew, known as Biblical Hebrew. The language of ninth century BC Moabite inscriptions is an offshoot of the Canaanite language commonly in use between the fourteenth to eighth centuries BC in Syria-Palestine. The form of the letters here used supplies very important and interesting information regarding the history of the formation of the alphabet, as well as, incidentally, the arts of civilized life of those times in the land of Moab. This ancient monument, recording the heroic struggles of King Mesha with Omri and Ahab, was erected about 850 BC. Here "we have the identical slab on which the workmen of the old world carved the history of their own times, and from which the eye of their contemporaries read thousands of years ago the record of events of which they themselves had been the witnesses."

In 1994, after examining both the Mesha Stele and the paper squeeze of it in

the Louvre Museum, the French scholar André Lemaire reported that line 31 of the Mesha Stele bears the phrase “the house of David”. Lemaire had to supply one destroyed letter, the first “D” in “[D]avid,” to decode the wording. The complete sentence in the latter part of line 31 would then read, “As for Horonen, there lived in it the house of [D]avid,” וחורנן. ישב. בה. בת[ד]וד. (Note: square brackets [ ] enclose letters or words that have been supplied where letters were destroyed or were on fragments that are still missing.) Most scholars find that no other letter supplied there yields a reading that makes sense. Baruch Margalit attempted to supply a different letter there: “m,” along with several other letters in places after that. The reading that resulted was “Now Horoneyn was occupied at the en[d] of [my pre]decessor['s reign] by [Edom]ites.” However, Margalit’s reading has failed to attract any significant support in scholarly publications.

In 2001, another French scholar, Pierre Bordreuil, reported (in an essay in French) that he and a few other scholars could not confirm Lemaire’s reading of “the house of David” in line 31 of the stele

Whereas the later mention of the “House of David” on a Tel Dan stele fragment was written by an Aramaean enemy king, this inscription comes from a Moabite enemy of Israel, also boasting of a victory. If Lemaire is right, there are now two early references to David’s dynasty, one in the Mesha Stele (mid-9th century) and the other in the Tel Dan Stele (mid-9th to mid-8th century).

The identifications of the biblical Mesha, king of Moab, and of the biblical Omri, king of the northern kingdom of Israel, in the Mesha stele are generally accepted by the scholarly community, especially because what is said about them in the narrative of the Mesha stele agrees well with the narrative in the biblical books of Kings and Chronicles.

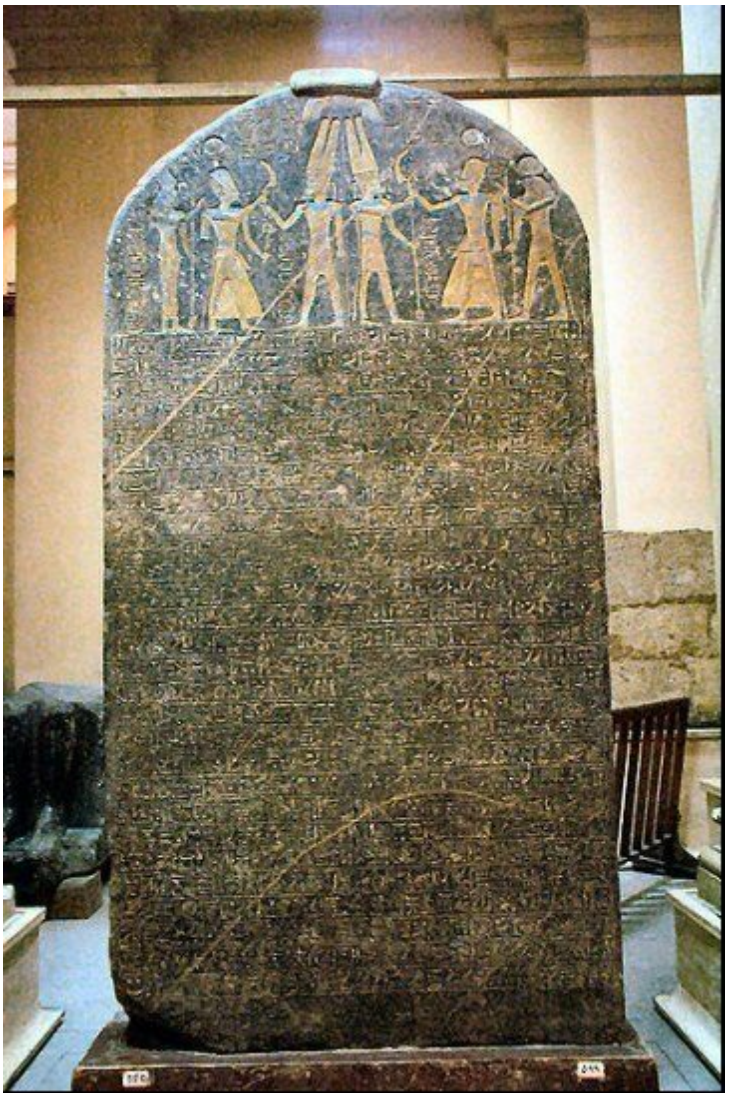
The identification of David in the Mesha stele, however, needs more investigation. This is partly from the fragmentary state of line 31 of the Mesha stele and partly from a tendency since the 1990s, largely among European scholars, to question or dismiss the historical reliability of the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament). In Europe, P. R. Davies, Thomas L. Thompson, and Niels P. Lemche show a strong tendency to reject biblical historicity and are highly prejudiced against anything that shows the

reliability of the Bible, whereas André Lemaire, K. A. Kitchen, Jens Bruun Kofoed, and other European scholars are exceptions to this tendency. Many scholars lean in one direction or the other but few actually occupy the middle ground. In general, North American and Israeli scholars tend to be more willing to accept the identification of the biblical King David in the Mesha stele. The discussion over whether ancient inscriptions confirm the existence of the King David mentioned in the Bible usually focuses less on the Mesha stele and more on the Tel Dan stele.

The Stele is also significant in that it mentions the Hebrew name of God – YHWH. It is thought to be one of the earliest known reference to the sacred name in any artifact.

Merneptah Stele

Also known as the Israel Stele or Victory Stele of Merneptah, it is the reverse of a large granite stele originally erected by the Ancient Egyptian king Amenhotep III, but later inscribed by Merneptah who ruled Egypt from 1213 to 1203 BC. The black granite stela primarily commemorates a victory in a campaign against the Libu and Meshwesh Libyans and their Sea People allies, but its final two lines refer to a prior military campaign in Canaan in which Merneptah states that he defeated Ashkelon, Gezer, Yanoam and Israel among others. The stele was discovered in the first court of Merneptah's mortuary temple at Thebes by Flinders Petrie in 1896. Petrie remarked "This stele will be better known in the world than anything else I have found" and is now in the collection of the Egyptian Museum at Cairo; a fragmentary copy of the stele was also found at Karnak. It stands some ten feet tall, and its text is mainly a prose report with a poetic finish, mirroring other Egyptian New Kingdom stelae of the time. The stela is dated to Year 5, 3rd month of Shemu (summer), day 3 (c.1209/1208 BC), and begins with a laudatory recital of Merneptah's achievements in battle.



Merneptah Stele

The stele has gained much fame for being the only Ancient Egyptian document generally accepted as mentioning “Isrir” or “Israel”. It is also, by far, the earliest known attestation of Israel. For this reason, many scholars refer to it as the “Israel stele”. This title is somewhat misleading because the stele is clearly not concerned about Israel— in fact, it mentions Israel only in passing. There is only one line about Israel: “Israel is wasted, bare of seed” or “Israel lies waste, its seed no longer exists” and very little about the region of Canaan. Israel is simply grouped together with three other defeated states in Canaan (Gezer, Yanoam and Ashkelon) in the stele. Merneptah inserts just a single stanza to the Canaanite campaigns but multiple stanzas to his defeat of the Libyans. The line referring to Merneptah’s Canaanite campaign reads:

Canaan is captive with all woe. Ashkelon is conquered, Gezer seized, Yanoam made nonexistent; Israel is wasted, bare of seed.

Merneptah's campaign: There is disagreement among anti-Bible thinkers about the the admission that Assyria had lost in battle. The argue that, as a stela by Merneptah's predecessor Ramesses II about the Battle of Kadesh indicates firm control of the Levant, making it strange that Merneptah had to reconquer it – unless Merneptah had faced a revolt in this region that he felt compelled to crush in order to exert Egypt's authority over Canaan. In this case, Merneptah's control over Canaan was precarious at best. However, disclaiming historical documents that support the Bible has become fashionable among radical scholars, and their biased opinions should not be taken seriously.

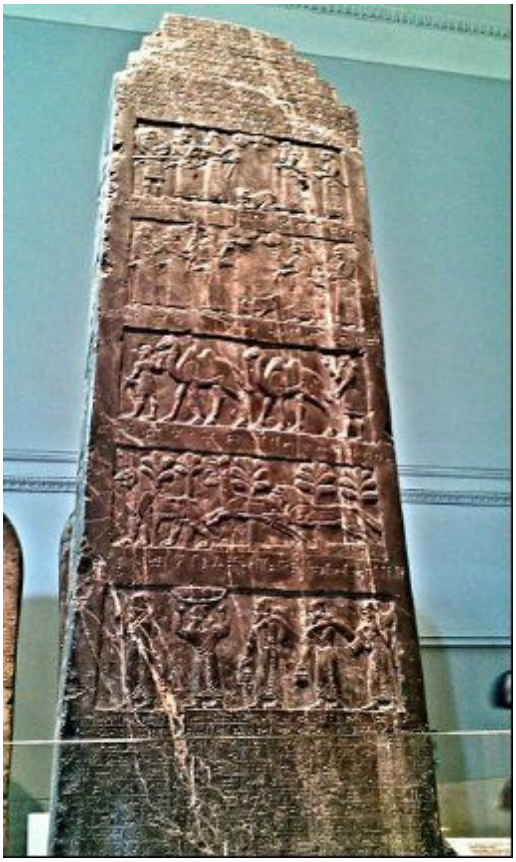
Mention of Israel: The stela does make clear that Israel, at this stage, refers to a people since a hieroglyphic determinative for "country" is absent regarding Israel. The next non-Biblical source about Israel, detailing a campaign against Moab by Omri, appears some 300 years later in the Mesha Stele. Regardless, the stele is an important source for Israelite history simply because it is the first official record in history of an "Israel", even if this record does not explain much.

An explanation offered by Michael G. Hasel, director of the Institute of Archaeology at Southern Adventist University, is that Israel was already a well established political force in Canaan in the late 13th century BCE: "Israel functioned as an agriculturally based or sedentary socio-ethnic entity in the late 13th century BCE one that is significant enough to be included in the military campaign against political powers in Canaan. While the Merneptah stela does not give any indication of the actual social structure of the people of Israel, it does indicate that Israel was a significant socio-ethnic entity that needed to be reckoned with."

The stela provides much insight into history of Bible times.

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

The “Black Obelisk” of Shalmaneser III (reigned 858-824 BC) is a black limestone Neo-Assyrian bas-relief sculpture from Nimrud (ancient Kalhu), in northern Iraq. Height: 197.85 cm. Width: 45.08 cm. It is currently displayed in the British Museum.



Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

It is the most complete Assyrian obelisk yet discovered, and is historically significant because it displays the earliest ancient depiction of an Israelite. It was erected as a public monument in 825 BCE at a time of civil war. It was discovered by archaeologist Sir Henry Layard in 1846.

The obelisk features twenty reliefs, five on each side. They depict five different subdued kings, bringing tribute and prostrating before the Assyrian king. From top to bottom they are: (1) Sua of Gilzanu (in north-west Iran),

(2) “Jehu of Bit Omri” (Jehu of the House of Omri), (3) an unnamed ruler of Musri (probably Egypt), (4) Marduk-apil-usur of Suhi (middle Euphrates, Syria and Iraq), and (5) Qalparunda of Patin (Antakya region of Turkey). Each scene occupies four panels around the monument and is described by a cuneiform script above them.

The second register from the top includes the earliest surviving picture of an Israelite: the Biblical Jehu, king of Israel. It describes how Jehu brought or sent his tribute in or around 841 BCE.

Jehu severed Israel’s alliances with Phoenicia and Judah, and became subject to Assyria. The caption above the scene, written in Assyrian cuneiform, can be translated:

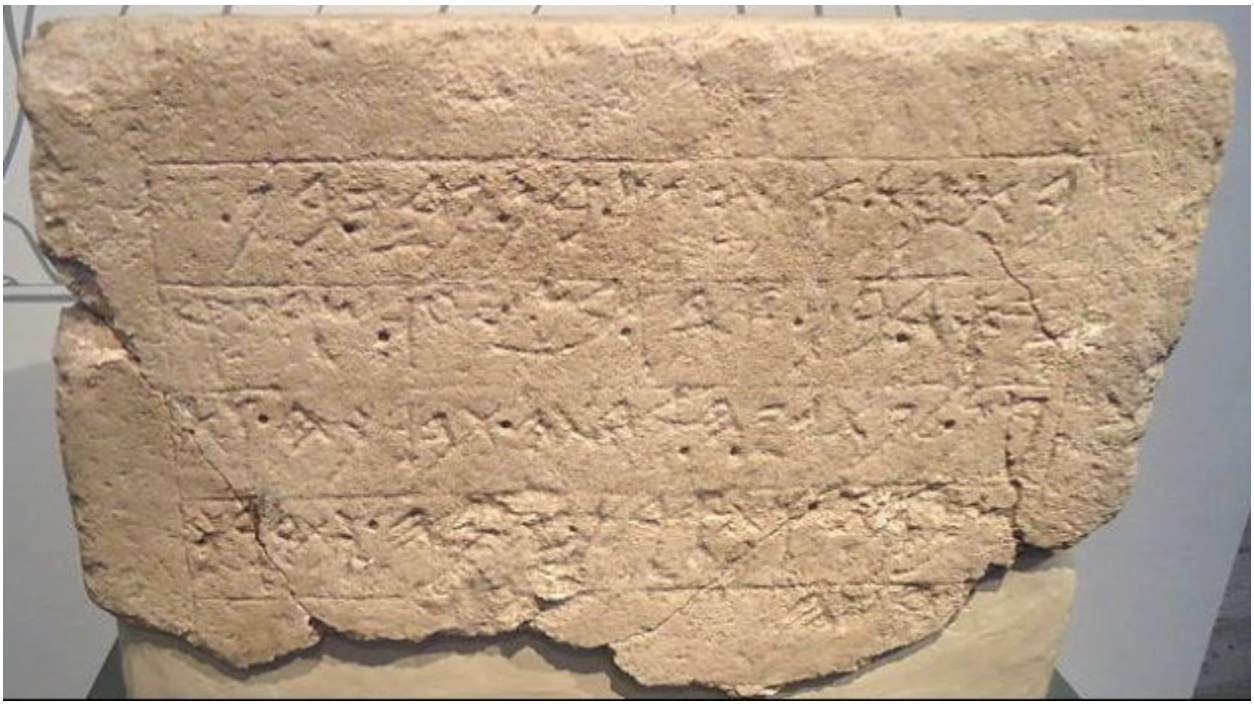
“The tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears.”

On the top and the bottom of the reliefs there is a long cuneiform inscription recording the annals of Shalmaneser III. It lists the military campaigns which the king and his commander-in-chief headed every year, until the thirty-first year of reign. Some features might suggest that the work had been commissioned by the commander-in-chief, Dayyan-Assur.

This inscription provides valuable historical information related to Biblical history.

Ekron Inscription

The city of Ekron (Hebrew: עֶקְרוֹן ʿeqrōn, also transliterated Accaron) was one of the five cities of the famed Philistine ‘pentapolis,’ located in southwestern Canaan.



The Ekron Inscription

During the Iron Age, Ekron was a border city on the frontier contested between Philistia and the kingdom of Judah. Located at a site now known as Tel Mikne (or Tel Miqne), its identification with the Biblical city was possible due to its presence in the small Palestinian village of Akir, whose name is thought to be derived from the ancient name. Akir was among hundreds of villages destroyed and depopulated in the 1948 Israeli-Arab War).

Ekron lies 35 kilometers west of Jerusalem, and 18 kilometers north of Gath, on the western edge of the inner coastal plain. Excavations in 1981-1996 at the low square tel have made Ekron one of the best documented Philistine sites.

Ekron was a settlement of the indigenous Canaanites. The Canaanite city had

shrunk in the years before its main public building burned in the thirteenth century BCE; it was refounded by Philistines at the beginning of the Iron Age, ca 1200s BCE.

Ekron is mentioned in the Book of Joshua 13:2-3: “This is the land that still remains: all the regions of the Philistines and all those of the Geshurites from Shihor, which is east of Egypt, northward to the boundary of Ekron.”

Joshua 3:13 counts it the border city of the Philistines and seat of one of the five Philistine city lords, and Joshua 15:11 mentions Ekron’s satellite towns and villages. The city was reassigned afterwards to the tribe of Dan (Joshua 19:43), but came again into the full possession of the Philistines. It was the last place to which the Philistines carried the ark before they sent it back to Israel (1 Samuel 5:10; 6:1-8).

There was here a noted sanctuary of Baal. The Baal who was worshipped was called Baal Zebul, which some scholars connect with Beelzebub, known from the Hebrew Bible: (2 Kings 1:2): “Ahaziah fell through the lattice in his upper chamber at Samaria and was injured. So he sent messengers whom he instructed: “Go inquire of Baal-zebub, the god of Ekron, whether I shall recover from this injury.” (JPS translation)

Non-Hebrew sources also refer to Ekron. The siege of Ekron in 712 BCE is depicted on one of Sargon II’s wall reliefs in his palace at Khorsabad, which names the city. Ekron revolted against Sennacherib and expelled Padi, his governor, who was sent to Hezekiah, at Jerusalem, for safe-keeping. Sennacherib marched against Ekron and the Ekronites called upon the aid of the king of Mutsri. Sennacherib turned aside to defeat this army, which he did at Eltekeh, and then returned and took the city by storm, put to death the leaders of the revolt and carried their adherents into captivity. This campaign led to the famous attack of Sennacherib on Hezekiah and Jerusalem, in which Sennacherib compelled Hezekiah to restore Padi, who was reinstated as governor at Ekron.

Excavations in the temple complex at Tel Miqne in 1996 recovered a significant artifact for the corpus of Biblical archaeology, a dedicatory inscription of the seventh-century king of Ekron ‘Akish. The inscription not only securely identifies the site, it gives a brief king-list of rulers of Ekron,

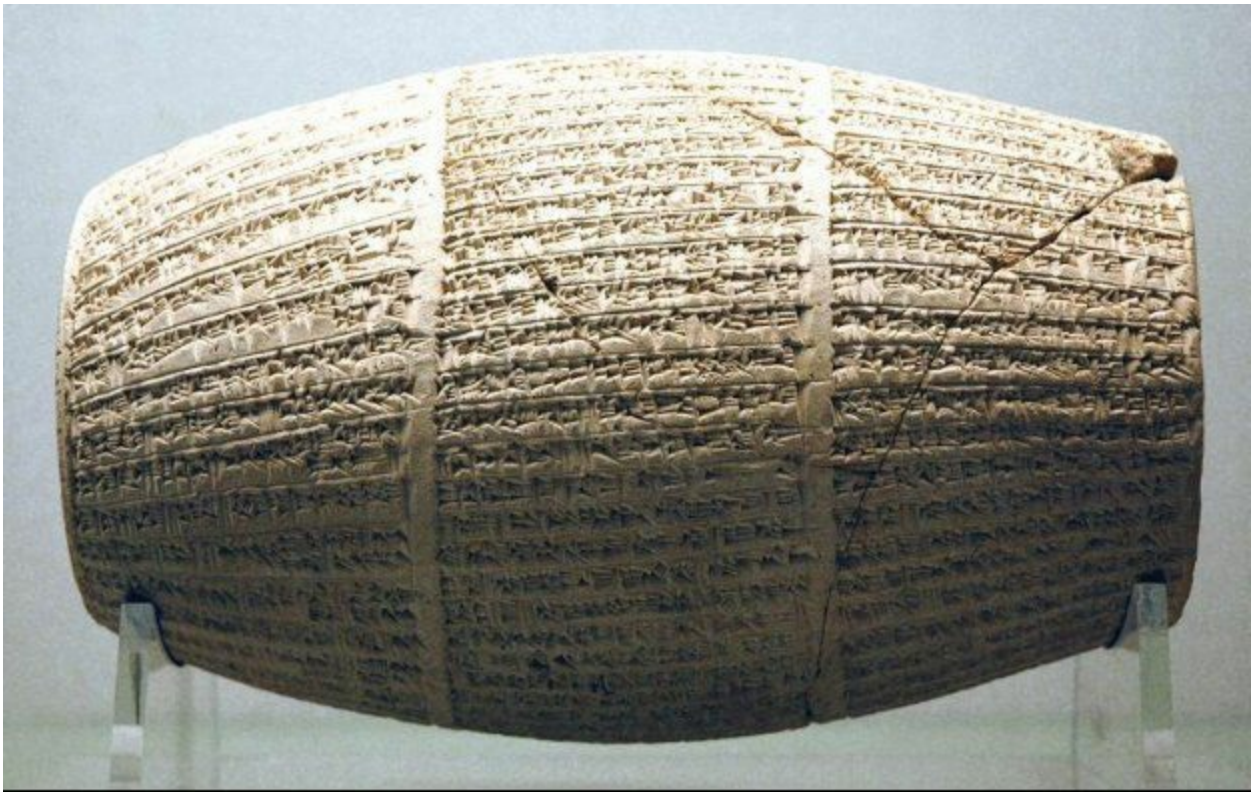
fathers to sons: Ya’ir, Ada, Yasid, Padi, ‘Akish.

Of more than local interest is the recipient of the inscription, ‘Akish’s divine “Lady. May she bless him, and guard him, and prolong his days, and bless his land.” The name or title of the Lady of Ekron is Ptgyh or Ptnyh. Aaron Demsky (Demsky 1997) reads the name asPtnyh and relates it to the title Potnia (“Mistress”) that was applied to the Great Goddess of the Aegean, in her various local manifestations, which include Mycenaean sites. A much earlier representation of the Lady of Ekron, perhaps thirteenth century BCE offers her left breast.

Ashdod and Ekron survived to become powerful city-states dominated by Assyria in the seventh century BCE. The city may have been destroyed by the Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzer II around 603 BCE, but it is mentioned, as “Accaron”, as late as 1 Maccabees 10:89.

Cylinder of Nabonidus

The Nabonidus Cylinder from Sippar is a long text in which king Nabonidus of Babylonia (556-539 BC) describes how he repaired three temples: the sanctuary of the moon god Sin in Harran, the sanctuary of the warrior goddess Anunitu in Sippar, and the temple of Šamaš in Sippar.



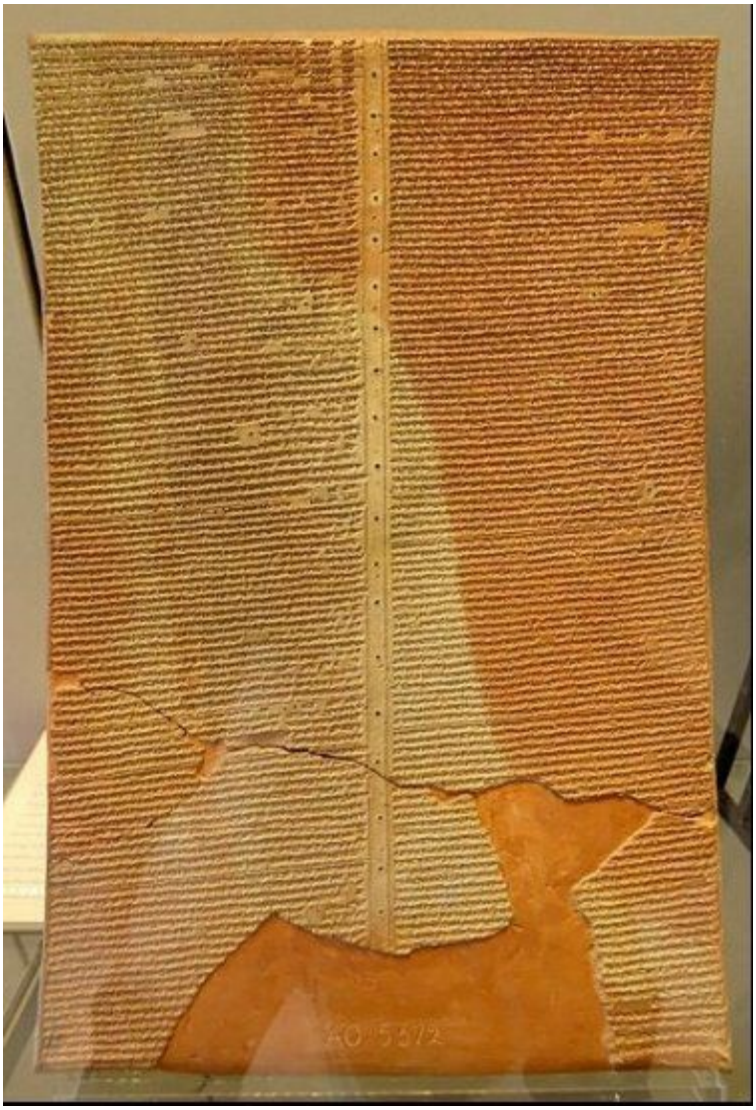
One copy was excavated in Babylon, in the royal palace, and is now in Berlin. Another copy is in the British Museum in London. The text was written after Nabonidus' return from Arabia in his thirteenth regnal year, but before war broke out with the Persian king Cyrus the Great, who is mentioned as an instrument of the gods.

The Nabonidus Cylinder contains echoes from earlier foundation texts, and develops the same themes as later ones, like the better-known Cyrus Cylinder: a lengthy titulary, a story about an angry god who has abandoned his shrine, who is reconciled with his people, orders a king to restore the temple, and a king who piously increases the daily offerings. Prayers are also

included.

Sargon II Inscriptions

Sargon II (Akkadian Šarru-kinu "legitimate king", reigned 722 BC-705 BC) was an Assyrian king. Sargon II became co-regent with Shalmaneser V in 722 BC, and became the sole ruler of the kingdom of Assyria in 709 BC after the death of Shalmaneser V. It is not clear whether he was the son of Tiglath-Pileser III or a usurper unrelated to the royal family. In his inscriptions, he styles himself as a new man, rarely referring to his predecessors; however he took the name Sharru-kinu, "true king", after Sargon of Akkad — who had founded the first Semitic Empire in the region some 16 centuries earlier. Sargon is the Biblical form of the name.



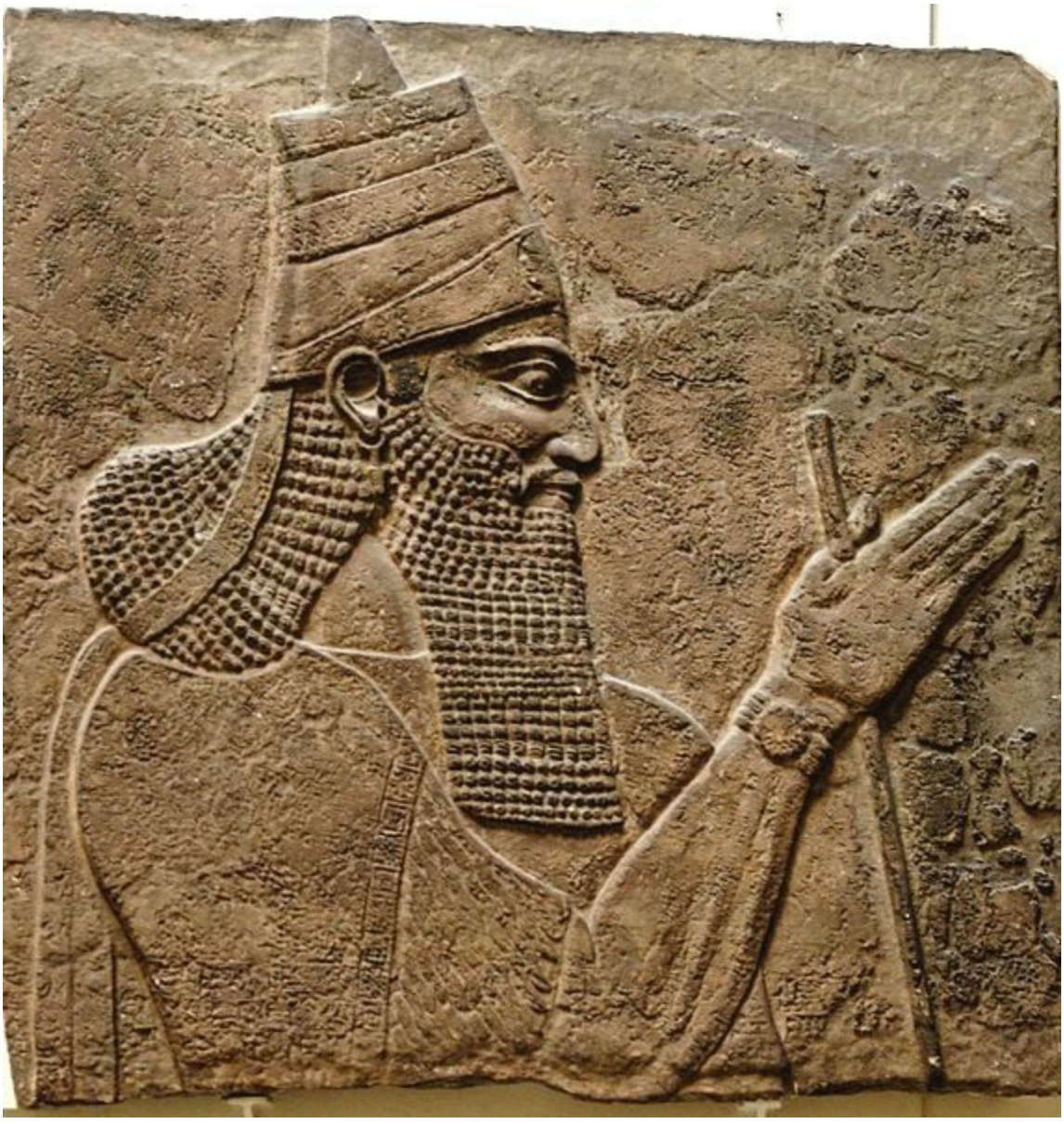
One Of The Many Sargon II Inscriptions

Under his rule, the Assyrians completed the defeat of the Kingdom of Israel, capturing Samaria after a siege of three years and exiling the inhabitants. This became the basis of the legends of the Lost Ten Tribes. According to the Bible, other people were brought to Samaria, the Samaritans, under his predecessor Shalmaneser V (2 Kings 18). Sargon's name actually appears in the Bible only once, at Isaiah 20:1, which records the Assyrian capture of Ashdod in 711 BC.

Several inscriptions from his time have been discovered and they have thrown considerable light into history of Old Testament times.

Tiglath-Pileser III’s Inscriptions at Nimrud

Tiglath-Pileser III (Akkadian: Tukultī-Apil-Ešarra) was a prominent king of Assyria in the 8th century BC (ruled 745–727 BC) and is widely regarded as the founder of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. He is considered to be one of the most successful military commanders in world history, conquering most of the world known to the ancient Assyrians before his death.



Assyrian power in the Near East greatly increased as the result of Tiglath-Pileser’s military reforms (see "Reforms" below) and his campaigns of conquest. Upon ascending the throne, he claimed (in Annal 9, which dates to

745 BC, his first regnal year (accession year) to have annexed Babylonia, from "Dur-(Kuri)galzu, Sippar of Shamash, … the cities [of Ba]bylonia up to the Uqnu river [by the shore of the Lo]wer [Sea]" (which referred to the Persian Gulf), and subsequently placed his eunuch over them as governor. Also within the first of his regnal years, he defeated Urartu (in modern Armenia), whose hegemony under the rulership of Sarduri II had extended to northern Mesopotamia and Syria. He also defeated the Medes before proceeding against the Neo-Hittites, Syria and Phoenicia. He took Arpad in 740 BC after three years of siege, annexed it as a province (over which he placed one of his eunuchs as governors), and subjected Hamath to tribute. Assyrian inscriptions record, in the fifth year of his reign 740 BC, a victory over Azariah (Uzziah), king of Judah, whose achievements are described in 2 Chronicles 26. In 733 BC his armies conquered Philistia on the Mediterranean coast, destroyed Damascus (732) and occupied most of Israel (732), with its northern regions becoming Assyrian provinces. According to the royal inscriptions of Tiglath-Pileser, many of the inhabitants were deported to other parts of the Assyrian empire, a practice that was commonly enacted by his predecessors.

In October 729 BC, Tiglath-Pileser assumed total control of Babylon, capturing the Babylonian king Nabu-mukin-zeri and having himself crowned as "King Pulu of Babylon".

Biblical records: Biblical records, corroborated by Assyrian ones, describe how Tiglath-Pileser III exacted 1000 talents of silver tribute from King Menahem of Israel (2 Kings 15:19) and defeated his successor Pekah (15:29). Pekah had allied with Rezin, king of the Arameans against Ahaz (known to the Assyrians as Yahu-khazi), king of Judah, who responded by appealing for the Assyrian monarch’s help with the Temple gold and silver. Tiglath-Pileser complied by seizing Damascus, executing Rezin, and deporting the Aramaean inhabitants to Kir (16:9). He also seized the northern half of Israel, and deported the Reubenites, Gadites, and Manasseh to Halah, Habor, Hara, and the Gozan river (1 Chron. 5:26). Despite the alliance, he apparently caused some trouble for Ahaz as well (2 Chron 28:20).

Tiglath-Pileser III’s conquests and reforms led to the establishment of the Neo-Assyrian Kingdom as a true empire. He built a royal palace in Nimrud

(the so-called "central palace") later to be dismantled by Esarhaddon. On the sculptured slabs decorating his palace, across the bas-reliefs depicting his military achievements, he had engraved his royal annals.

On his death, he was succeeded by his son Ululayu, who took the name Shalmaneser V, who further campaigned in the Levant and captured Samaria.

Zayit Stone Inscription

The Zayit Stone is a 38-pound limestone boulder excavated from Tel Zayit (Zeitah) in southwest Israel (the Beth Guvrin Valley about 35 miles from Jerusalem). It carries what appears to be an inscribed abecedary (18 letters carved in the first line; at least 2 in the second line with 2 terminating symbols) and remnants of several other inscriptions (at least 3 words plus 2 other pairs of terminating symbols).

Description: One side of the stone carries the abecedary, or alphabet, extending over 2 lines:

אבגדוהחזטwילכמנספעצ

ק ש ||

The side opposite this inscription has a bowl-shaped depression. Elsewhere, the stone also bears graffiti inscriptions, "help/warrior" (עזר) and "bowl/throne" (כס).

Circumstances of the discovery: Excavations under the direction of R.E. Tappy have been conducted at Tel Zayit during 1999-2001, 2005, and 2007. A volunteer excavator, Dan Rypma, discovered the stone on July 15, 2005.

Significance: The inscription was discovered in-situ in what appears to be a secondary usage but a primary context (i.e., as a building stone rather than in a random pile of debris, or merely on the surface). It is one of the earliest dateable examples of an alphabet (or of writing in general) from Syria-

Palestine, and several inferences can be drawn from it:

Its locus was a stratum caused by a fire dated by the excavators to the 10th century BCE. Until this discovery, critics could say inhabitants of this region at this period were illiterate and could not have recorded events mentioned in the Bible, though this single instance of writing does not imply anything about the veracity of the Bible.

It not only preserves writing – simple graffiti – but an ordered list of letters (although there are 4 pairs of letters swapped from their modern alphabetic order, and possibly 2 other omitted or aborted letters; indications that reflect negatively on the scribe's skill level).

The site is located in a region not central to the government of the Israelite monarchy (Jerusalem), which suggests that if people in this agricultural community could write, certainly people in the regional governments were equally capable. This, however, does not imply that the culture at this location at this time was related to the Israelites.

Its placement in a wall, and the context of its inscriptions ("help/warrior" and "bowl/throne") may indicate a belief that the letters possessed magical/apotropaic power to ward off evil spirits. Though it was probably plastered over in the wall where it was discovered and could not be read, it may have been ceremonially placed there during the wall's construction.

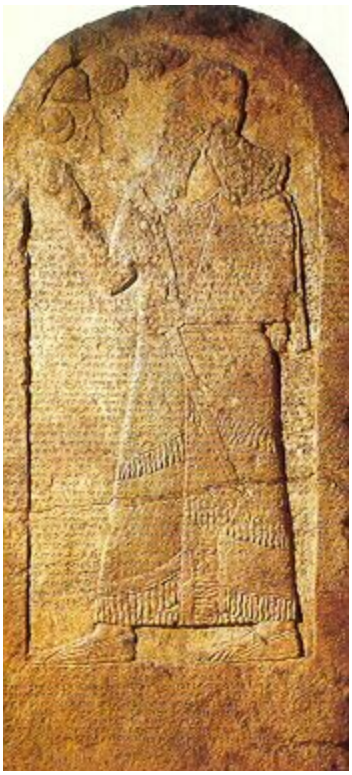
At an SBL presentation in November 2005, Ron Tappy seemed to favour the idea that the stone bowl (the reverse side of the stone block) had originally been used as a mortar for grinding herbs or equivalent usage. At the same event P. Kyle McCarter, the epigrapher attached to the Tel Zeitah excavation, characterised the inscription as an abecedary, and said that the letter forms suggest a South Canaanite development from the Phoenician base alphabet. In questioning after the presentation, McCarter added that the inscription (which he had earlier said was apparently the work of a good scribe) was a practice piece (he had earlier mentioned that it gave him the impression of carelessness). Tappy expressed his opinion that it was unlikely, for physical reasons, that the inscription was carved after the stone was placed in the wall.

The primary significance of the inscription will be for the development of early South Levant alphabets and letter-forms. It is not yet certain how old

the inscription is – the destruction level indicates a date for the wall, but it is not known how much earlier than this the inscription is. McCarter has elsewhere suggested that the letter-forms are comparable to those of the Gezer calendar, and date from the early to mid-11th century.

Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III

The Kurkh Monolith is an Assyrian document that contains a description of the Battle of Qarqar at the end. The Monolith stands some 2.2 metres tall, and roughly covers years one through six of the reign of Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (859-824 BC), although the fifth year is missing. Most scholars believe that the scribe who wrote the Monolith was sloppy, and have pointed out a number of possible errors in the text, like the identification of Byblos as Que.



The Monolith mainly deals with campaigns Shalmaneser made in western Mesopotamia and Syria, fighting extensively with the countries of Bit Adini and Carchemish. At the end of the Monolith comes the account of the Battle of Qarqar, where an alliance of twelve kings fought against Shalmaneser at the Syrian city of Qarqar. This alliance, comprising eleven kings, was led by Irhuleni of Hamath and Hadadezer of Damascus, with a considerable force led by King Ahab of Israel. The Monolith is also the first time that the Arabs make an appearance in world history, fielding a contingent containing camels

led by King Gindibu.

Scribal errors and disputes: There are a number of issues surrounding the written words contained in the Monolith, mostly surrounding the text of the Battle of Qarqar. For example, the scribe lists one city as Gu-a-a, which some scholars believe refers to Que. However, H. Tadmor believes that this is actually a mistake, with Gu-a-a being an incorrect spelling for Gu-bal-a-a, that is, Byblos. Other scholars have also pointed out that it would be more logical if Shalmaneser fought Byblos instead of Que, because it would make better geographic sense – since the other kings of the area are polities to the south and west of Assyria, it might be expected that another city-state in that area – Byblos – would fight at Qarqar, rather than Que, which is in Cilicia.

Another issue with regard to spelling is the term musri, which is Akkadian for "march". Tadmor says that the actual Musri people had been conquered by the Assyrians in the 11th century BC, and thus believes that this reference to Musri must be "Egypt", although some scholars dispute this.

Another major error in the text is the assertion that Assyria fought "twelve kings". Casual readers will note that the Monolith in fact lists eleven, but some scholars have attempted to explain that there really is a missing king, stemming from the description of "Ba'sa the man of Bit-Ruhubi, the Ammonite". One scholar suggests that the two entities be split into "Bit-Ruhubi" (Beth-Rehob, a state in the Trans-Jordan) and "Ammon", one of Israel's traditional enemies. However, "twelve kings" is a common Mesopotamian literary device for any kind of alliance, so it is entirely possible that the scribe here was using a figure of speech, rather than miscounting.

All of this is an indication that further research is needed into these historical narratives.

Siloam inscription

The Siloam (Shiloach) inscription or Silwan inscription (in reference to Jerusalem neighborhood called Silwan) is a passage of inscribed text originally found in the Hezekiah tunnel (which feeds water from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam in East Jerusalem). Discovered in 1838, the

inscription records the construction of the tunnel in the 8th century BCE. It is among the oldest extant records of its kind written in Hebrew using the Paleo-Hebrew alphabet. Traditionally identified as a "commemorative inscription", it has also been classified as a votive offering inscription.

History of the discovery: Despite Hezekiah's tunnel being examined extensively during the 19th century by such eminent archaeologists as Dr. Edward Robinson, Sir Charles Wilson, and Sir Charles Warren, they all missed discovering the inscription, probably due to the accumulated mineral deposits making it barely noticeable.

According to Easton's Bible Dictionary (1897), a youth, while wading up Hezekiah's tunnel from the Siloam Pool end, discovered the inscription cut in the rock on the eastern side, about 19 feet into the tunnel.

The Siloam inscription was surreptitiously cut from the wall of the tunnel in 1891 and broken into fragments; these were, however, recovered by the efforts of the British Consul at Jerusalem, and have been placed in Istanbul Archaeology Museum. Although housed in Turkey, Jerusalem Mayor Uri Lupolianski made the request on July 12th, 2007 in a meeting with Turkey's ambassador to Israel, Namik Tan to return the tablet to Jerusalem as a "goodwill gesture" between allies. Turkey has rejected such request, stating that the Siloam inscription was Imperial Ottoman Property, and thus is the cultural property of the Turkish Republic. However, President Abdullah Gul, stated that as a good will gesture from Turkey, they will display the

inscription in Jerusalem for a short period .

The Tunnel: In 1899, another tunnel, also leading from the Gihon Spring to the Siloam Pool area, but by a more direct route, was found. This latter tunnel is now known as the Middle Bronze Age channel, on account of its estimated age; Reich determined that it was constructed around 1800 BC (in the Middle Bronze Age). It is essentially a 20 feet deep ditch in the ground, which after construction was covered over by large rock slabs (which were then hidden in the foliage). It is narrower, but can still be walked by a human for most of its length. In addition to the (3ft high) exit near the Siloam pool, the channel has several small outlets that watered the gardens facing the Kidron Valley.

History: The ancient city of Jerusalem, being on a mountain, is naturally defensible from almost all sides, but suffers from the drawback that its major source of fresh water, the Gihon spring, is on the side of the cliff overlooking the Kidron valley. This presents a major military weakness as the city walls, if high enough to be defensible, must necessarily leave the Gihon spring outside, thus leaving the city without a fresh water supply in case of siege.

The Bible records that King Hezekiah (whom Albright dates to 715-687 BC), fearful that the Assyrians would lay siege to the city, blocked the spring's water outside the city and diverted it through a channel into the Pool of Siloam.

2 Kgs 20:20 (NRSV), "The rest of the deeds of Hezekiah, all his power, how he made the pool and the conduit and brought water into the city, are they not written in the Book of the Annals of the Kings of Judah?"

2 Chr 32:3-4 (NRSV), "he planned with his officers and his warriors to stop the flow of the springs that were outside the city; and they helped him. 4 A great many people were gathered, and they stopped all the springs and the wadi that flowed through the land, saying, "Why should the Assyrian kings come and find water in abundance?""

Translation: The inscription was unreadable at first due to the deposits, Professor A.H. Sayce was the first to make a tentative reading, and later the text was cleaned with an acid solution making the reading more authoritative. The inscription contains 6 lines, of which the first is damaged. The words are separated by dots. Only the word zada on the third line is of doubtful

translation – perhaps a crack or a weak part.

The passage reads:

… the tunnel … and this is the story of the tunnel while … the axes were against each other and while three cubits were left to cut? … the voice of a man … called to his counterpart, (for) there was ZADA in the rock, on the right … and on the day of the tunnel (being finished) the stonecutters struck each man towards his counterpart, ax against ax and flowed water from the source to the pool for 1200 cubits. and 100 cubits was the height over the head of the stonecutters …

The inscription hence records the construction of the tunnel; according to the text the work began at both ends simultaneously and proceeded until the stonecutters met in the middle. However, this idealised account does not quite reflect the reality of the tunnel; where the two sides met is an abrupt right angled join, and the centres do not line up. It has been theorised by 21st century archaeologists that the stonecutters may simply have been following a natural karst.

Summary

There are numerous other inscriptions related to Biblical Archeology, but the above sample is sufficient to show the importance of inscriptions and also the abundance of such material.